

I LOVE YOU TO DEATH

THE VOICE OF THE WOMAN ARTIST: SEX, VIOLENCE,
SENTIMENTALITY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of Master of Fine Art
Michaelis School of Fine Art
University of Cape Town
2008

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Signature: 20.10.08

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WITHOUT YOU I'M NOTHING¹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you:

Art Africa Centre and the 2008 Spier Contemporary Art Awards, without whom this body of work would never have been possible.

The MacIver Scholarship, K W Johnston Bequest, Jules Kramer, Harry Crossley Foundation and the Siri Johnston Bequest.

My assistants whose skill, patience and dedication have been invaluable:

Rowan Smith (the best assistant and friend a girl could ask for)

John Trafford

Tony East

Tony Walters

Ian Grose

Jonathan Kope

My family, who have always supported me despite everything:

Ethel and Jasper Stupart

Brenda and Carl Morrow (especially for the late night photography)

Douglas and Moira Stupart,

All of my friends who have helped in every possible way imaginable:

Ed Young (for a bed, a shower and a sinking horse)

Chad Rossouw (for Elton John and layout)

Ashley Kanter (for a sunset)

Stuart Bird (for years of help and advice)

Julie Donald (for always remaining calm)

Georgina Gratrix (for constantly reminding that making art is a good idea)

Lizza Littlewort (for tea and good ideas)

Michael Michael (for everything)

Catherine Ocholla, Natasha Norman, Matthew Partridge, Hugh Upsher (I'm sorry), Jake Aikman, Marco Filby, Callan Weinberg (for hugs and sadomasochism) and everyone else who I know will pull through for me in the final haul.

The staff of the Michaelis School of Fine Art:

The librarians: Anette, Gill and Kay (for years of putting up with me)

The administrative staff: Ingrid Willis, Lindsay Redman and Sharon

Stephen Inggs

Moneeb Dalwai, always.

I am particularly grateful to Andrew Lamprecht and Virginia MacKenny for their continual support and advice. And, of course, to my supervisor Malcolm Payne.

¹ Placebo and David Bowie. 1999. Without You I'm Nothing. Without You I'm Nothing. Virgin Records

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INTRODUCTION

TWO STORIES

At a dinner party in Durban after the opening of *Come*, a 2007 exhibition of Michaelis MFA students, a woman asked me about my work. When I told her it was "the bullets", by way of description (*One Hundred Bullets With Your Name On Them*), she said something along the lines of "oh, that's so fascinating, I really had thought a man had made them". If not for the fact that this woman was apparently a friend of our host, I would most probably have had a lot more to say in response. I was convinced that she showed an extreme lack of insight to miss the fact that one hundred bullets engraved with epitaphs like "I Love You" and "I never meant to Fuck you" and "I'm Sorry" in cursive handwriting was actually in response to, as opposed to a product of, male sexuality. To her, however, it seemed completely foreign for a young woman to use bullets in her work, or that this language could be accessible to me.

In 2008, after I took some students around *Come Again* (the second instalment of the MFA show) at the Michaelis Gallery, I encountered a student at a club called Evol (which is love spelt backwards). Our conversation went as follows:

Pretty First Year Boy: I thought that work [*Wanted*] was so like, you know, brave.

Me: Thank you, it was really difficult for me. You know I had to deal with some of the people who were in the work seeing it, and you know everyone on campus recognised these people. Hugh, actually, well you know he actually felt victimised by the piece. Oh and of course, my mother.

Pretty First Year: Ja, and also I mean everyone could seriously think you're a total slut.

In *Wanted* I present police composites of past lovers, whom I had described in interviews with a police sketch artist along with transcriptions of my half of each of these interviews. There are only ten faces, which to me seems a modest number. This work would cause me no end of trouble - from an ex boyfriend (number four on the list) threatening to destroy the piece as he didn't want to be seen as part of my "conquered list", to my tearful mother, and even a professor claiming I was libellously misrepresenting the men as rapists. The work was also vandalised as part of a performance piece commenting on notions of ownership, sexuality and masculinity, aimed specifically at one of the men in the composites¹.

I knew that putting my personal life in the public sphere - particularly on display in the incestuous art school pit - would be difficult. I was expecting some kind of backlash. What I wasn't expecting, however, was to be labelled a slut (something that

¹ See pg. 101: Daniella Mooney. I heart new work 2008.

happened more than once after this work was shown). Nor was I expecting to have a number of intelligent and educated friends referring to the work as "particularly male" and particularly dangerous. Although I had never had anyone be surprised by my appropriation of a scene from *The Neverending Story*², or my obsession with Furbies (they are appropriately cute), or even my desire to make a giant sunset; works that dealt explicitly with either sex or violence were seen as confusing, and somehow at odds with my identity as a woman artist. The exception to this is *You Do it To Yourself (and that's what really hurts)*, a bleeding wall, which had always struck me as particularly violent (and sexual). This work was permitted by those I discussed it with as it is "so feminist" in the link between menstruation, abjection and femininity.

Blood is ok, bullets are not.

The responses to my art production when seen in institutional exhibitions or as discussed amongst peers have shaped this dissertation in its discussion of the thematics of my work (sex, violence, sentimentality, nostalgia and love), with a particular leaning towards the experiences of women. In establishing women's position (or often, non-position) within these discourses, I present a frame within which to understand my position as an artist producing work in these spheres and about my own life. The dissertation then moves to a discussion of other women artists who work within similar spheres and thereafter to a detailed discussion of each of my works.

AS SERIOUS AS YOUR LIFE³

Love, life and death - all of that is the most mundane material for artists. It amuses me because people often say, doesn't it bother you to show your private life? I say, well if you ruled out private life, you would have to eliminate all poetry. Victor Hugo, Baudelaire and Verlaine use their emotional life as subject matter (Sophie Calle quoted in Chrisafis 2007: online).

This dissertation explicates a body of work that is at times sentimental and self-indulgent, oft reflecting highly emotional responses to personal and mediated experiences. Using song lyrics to title each chapter, as well as much of the individual work, I write each chapter within the context of a fantasy framed by angst, love and sex, all mediated through the words of contemporary music. This marker of what may appear to be a lack of seriousness towards my own project rather suggests that the project, which revolves largely around my own fantasies, betrayals and experiences of popular culture be considered with an appropriate seriousness.

My work and dissertation explore my own emotional life. Entitled *I Love You to Death*, the texts explore love in its various permutations: as the "market relationship" (Christian - Smith 1990:17) that is romance, as sexual desire, nostalgic longing, and also in terms of the gendered politics of heterosexual relations.

² The Neverending Story 1984. Wolfgang Petersen (director). West Germany: Warner Brothers.

³ Four Tet. 2003. As Serious as Your Life. Rounds. Domino Records.

The text that follows is highly gendered, speaking particularly of the condition of women in love, and always from the female (and heteronormative) viewpoint that is my own. The dissertation also focuses on the location of my voice as a woman artist, noting the position of women within language, sentimentality and sex, while looking into the role of both autobiography and catharsis in art-making.

The dissertation explicates the terrain of love, romance, violence and sentimentality, as well as the notions of catharsis that my art production around such themes is imbued with. *I Love You To Death* is a response to my life as a woman, an artist, and a lover – a text that is as serious as my or your, or certainly Victor Hugo, Baudelaire and Verlaine's lives.

WHAT IS LOVE? (BABY DON'T HURT ME)⁴

POWER, LANGUAGE AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Love, love, love - all the wretched can't of it, masking egotism, lust, masochism, fantasy under a mythology of sentimental postures, a welter of self-induced miseries and joys, blinding and masking the essential personalities in the frozen gestures of courtship, in the kissing and the dating and the desire, the compliments and the quarrels which vivify its barrenness (Greer 1971: 190).

The question of what love is cannot be answered within the scope of this document when so many countless artists, poets and philosophers have waxed over the problem without reaching any kind of determining conclusion nor, often wanting one. Love as a subject in and of itself is nearly impossible to surmount, for by love do I, in fact, mean to be 'in love' (referring in this case to the physical love between a man and woman)? The love I discuss here is what might be termed 'romantic love'. However, the notion of romance is severely codified (as discussed later); thus this too is a problematic definition. Perhaps (hetero)sexual love would be more accurate, for the physical enactment of love is central to the discussion here – again though this would presume that one cannot love a partner without sex (which is untrue) and that one cannot have sex without love (which is certainly false).

The problem with writing on love is that in my present status of not being in love the language of love is unknowable to me, and even in love, my language would be limited perhaps only to my lover in unsure fragmented texts. "For is not love that condition which, almost by definition, escapes the analytical gaze? This is not to say that love is mysterious or unknowable, or even something mystical. It is simply to acknowledge that the world of love – or, more accurately, of the lovers – is one that cannot easily be represented" (Lechte 2004: 63). Language, then, fails when it comes to love. Words, as many a song goes, really cannot express my love for you.

In a psychoanalytical model that privileges the phallus and its unitary mode of expression, women especially are denied access to the vocabulary needed to describe love, sex and eroticism, and by extension to language and culture itself. In particular, the Freudian model of psychoanalytical studies denies women their subjectivity, selfhood and expression. The following chapter therefore discusses the position of women within language, and particularly the articulation of desire, love and eroticism to, and for, the other.

FREUD CAN SUCK MY DICK⁵

A discussion of woman's subjectivity must begin with Freud whose theories about identity formation have remained hugely influential, particularly his phallogocentric view of sexual formation and difference. In his canonical *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) Freud essentially posits women only and particularly as both inferior and envious of men, defining the notion of 'penis envy' even from infancy. Describing the moment when the young girl encounters her male friend's penis: "she is immediately prepared to recognise it, and soon becomes envious of the penis; this envy reaches its highest point in the consequentially important wish that she also should be a boy" (1977 [1905]: 114). Freud's recognition of the penis comes with an acknowledgement of the clitoris as the "chief erogenous zone in the female child" (142). However, he describes the clitoris only as "homologous to the male penis" (Ibid.) and as an organ that is largely useless to the sexual act in adults, when women (apparently 'naturally') need to repress their sexuality in order to "turn into women" (143). In womanhood, apparently, the clitoris serves only to "conduct the excitement to the adjacent female parts, and in this [the clitoris] acts like a chip of pine wood which is utilised to set fire to the harder wood" (143). Freud continues to establish a male defined sexuality describing the libido as "invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or women and irrespectively of whether its object is a man or a woman" (141). In this establishment of the androcentric⁶ view of the sex act itself and of the development of the self, Freud fails entirely to recognise the vagina as anything other than the opposition to the penis, a lack that defines women (particularly in terms of their supposed neurosis) in Freud's terms as castrated vessels to be filled only when they are pregnant (possibly with a male child) or engaged in sex with a man. These theories are re-iterated in his later essay, *Femininity* (1933) where Freud continues to apply his own male experience of the world to the understanding of the experiences of women.

"In Lacan's scheme, the penis is also what a woman demands and thus wants from a man and ultimately is what she seeks by having a child. Of course, the imaginary penis is phantasmic and leads to the function that the phallus has as the ultimate signifier" (McAfee, 2004: 32). Lacan replaces Freud's theories of the penis with that of the phallus, which his followers continually insist is not related to the penis itself. However, as Irigaray points out in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985 [1974]), since Lacan continues the Freudian model, he is as guilty of privileging the penis (be it real or imaginary) as his predecessor.

⁵ I once encountered a woman with this text printed on a t-shirt. I have never seen the t-shirt again nor can I find any reference to the phrase before or since, but it has stuck with me.

⁶ The term 'androcentric' is loosely applied to a masculine bias within philosophy, psycho-sexual and theological studies to indicate assumptions about the whole of humanity based only on male experiences of the world. In essence, androcentric theories are postulated by men and presume male experience and opinion as the only viewpoint necessary to define a particular element of human behaviour.

Even Kristeva, who is well respected for positing a female voice into the volumes of writing about women, seems intent on maintaining the metaphor of the phallus as the ultimate signifier, surprisingly blasé to the implications this model holds within language and psychoanalysis. When asked by Rosalind Coward in an interview how she felt about the "criticism that the paternal metaphor is itself a problem because it reproduces ideologies about women and men, even in attempts to talk symbolically" (Coward 1984 in Oliver (ed) 1997: 335), Kristeva replied that it is "unnecessary" to use these terms: "if you prefer to call them X and Y, why not? But I'm not sure that changes much" (Ibid.).

This pervasive psychoanalytical model then establishes a vocabulary of desire that both privileges the male subject and denies women a voice within the understanding of human behaviour – a phallogocentric language that establishes woman not only as inferior to men, but as absent altogether.

MALE DOMINATION

The question, what is love, asked at the beginning of this chapter (which we continue to find is one that is almost impossible to answer from the female point of view) is encapsulated within a plea to the lover, "baby don't hurt me"⁷. While notions of sex and violence are discussed in a later chapter, the idea that love is potentially damaging to women stems from the male domination that is implicit in the passivity implied by women's non-position in language, culture, relationships and everyday life within the Freudian model, where hurt as a female response to love seems inevitable.

Irigaray summarises the Freudian model as such: "an organised system whose meaning is regulated by paradigms and units of value that are in turn determined by male subjects. Therefore, the feminine must be deciphered as inter-dict: within the signs between them, between the realised meanings and between the lines [...] and as a function of the (re)productive necessities of an intentionally phallic currency, which for lack of the collaboration of a (potentially female) other, can immediately be assumed to need *its* other, a sort of inverted or negative alter ego – "black" too, like a photographic negative" (1985 [1974]: 22). In essence, once again "woman is defined as a mystical being, a negative to be discussed (though never fully discovered) with disbelief and awe, in a discourse that by its definition places women "off-stage, off-side, beyond representation, beyond selfhood" (Ibid.).

This re-iteration of woman as negative is one that is mirrored in a number of dualities that the notion implies: male/female, positive/negative, active/passive, private/public, culture/nature and so on; all based on the "darkness" of women and their supposed hidden genitals. These truisms that posit women as closer to nature, or as submissive creatures that belong at home, are mirrored in the traditional model of the nuclear family, the institution of marriage, the act of sex and within personal relationships. Woman, as

Other, the non subject, is (if she is in any position at all) bound to submissiveness, to be dominated by men in a series of justifications for her lower caste. "In proving woman's inferiority, the anti-feminists then began to draw not only upon religion and philosophy as before, but also upon science – biology, experimental psychology etc" (De Beavoir 1953 [1949]: 23).

Biological sexual difference is possibly the most common defender of the male super race, followed shortly by pseudo-psychology, resulting in the most annoying assertions (e.g. "Did you hear They have proven that women actually are more intuitive than men?"⁸). Science is, unfortunately, equated unequivocally with truth; a reassuring testament used to justify everything from abhorrent forms of racialism to the superiority of a new washing powder (wielded, of course, by smiling housewives). The fact that today there are men without penises and women without uteruses surely muddies the gender waters, as evidenced most recently in Thomas Beatie, a transgendered man, who maintained his 'female' reproductive organs in order to become pregnant and give birth to a baby girl. This aside (and it is a particularly rich aside), the standard for sexual difference has always resided largely in the seemingly objective model of physical sexual difference.

Bourdieu asserts in his *Masculine Domination*, however, that it is the social world that constructs the body as sexually defined, "as the depository of sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division" (2001: 11). Thus, though it may suffice to say (or have said) that men have penises and woman vaginas (purposefully excluding other erogenous zones in this particular duality), the logic of reproduction as a man emptying his seed into the vessel of woman so that she can then carry 'his' child inside her is one that is inherently codified. It presents the androcentric (which is assumed to be the natural) model of sexuality to which the passivity of women is central. "The androcentric model of sex as an activity recognises three essential steps: preparation for penetration ("foreplay"), penetration, and male orgasm. Sexual activity that does not involve at least the last two has not been popularly or medically (or for that matter legally) regarded as 'the real thing'" (Maines 2001: 5). This model of sexuality also then leads to the idea that men are more active as they deposit their seed in their dormant mate, stronger as they are after all the ones who do all the work and to the classic assumption that men have higher sex drives than women. The latter presumption is particularly fascinating, as until the very late 19th century it was known as fact that women were more sexually demanding than men. This particular 'fact' was used to explain hysteria amongst women in the 1800s, where women became hysterical, their uteruses rising up and strangling them because they were unable to satisfy their sexual urges – something their sensible husbands could never manage. This in turn led to the invention of the electromechanical vibrator in 1880 as a totally non-taboo, useful home solution to provide the female orgasm (Maines

⁷ Haddaway, 1993. What is Love, 'Haddaway' Coconut Records

⁸ I have actually had a conversation with someone that started like this: It did not go much further.

TALKING SHIT ABOUT A PRETTY SUNSET¹⁰

SENTIMENTALITY, KITSCH, NOSTALGIA AND ROMANCE

Women hate everything which strips off the tinsel of sentiment, and they are right, or it would rob them of their weapons (Byron in Wolfson 2006: 176).

Sentimentality is to women, what pornography is to men. Just as porn is designed to arouse a physical response in men, so the sob story is designed to create an emotional catharsis for women (R. P. Clark quoted in Cavalier 2005: Online).

Sentimentality, nostalgia and kitsch are historically defined as flaws, both as character traits and when evident in the arts. "To call a piece "sentimental" or kitsch is to say that it is very bad art – if, indeed, it deserves recognition as art at all" (Solomon 1991:3). As the opening quotations suggest, sentimentality is particularly associated with and marketed to women, many of whom's supposed feminine qualities of passivity, affinity to nature, compassion and emotion-based behaviour are implicit in the warnings of sentimentality's detractors. Kitsch, although strongly linked to sentimentality, is important in its application to art, particularly considering its abhorrence throughout the linear, progress driven canon of modernity.

Nostalgia, even in its etymology from the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (grief or suffering) (Lowenthal 1985:10), explicitly presents dangers for women in its literal plea to return to the domestic space of the home - an appeal that is symptomatic of the millennial obsession with a misplaced longing for a non-existent, better past.

Romance, particularly as proffered in cheap fiction and girls' and women's magazines, is a product of social ideals of femininity, proffers at great profit an anesthetised and regulating ideal of love, sex, relationships and family that women are encouraged to ravenously consume.

SENTIMENTALITY

Sentimentality and kitsch reveal not only woefully inadequate aesthetic sense but a deep moral flaw of character (Solomon 1991:3).

Kitsch and sentimentality are often spoken of almost interchangeably, particularly in instances of what Kathleen Higgins refers to as "sweet kitsch", apparent in that

¹⁰ Modest Mouse. 1996 Talking Shit About a Pretty Sunset. This is A Long Drive for Someone With Nothing to Think About. Up Records.

affectionate imagery of lovers holding hands (but not having sex) on the beach, puppies imploring us with oversized eyes and pigtailed, clean children playing on the grass. In discussing sweet kitsch Higgins considers what she refers to as its "alleged emotional benefits: (1) sweet kitsch makes the world sweeter and excludes what is intolerable; (2) sweet kitsch provides easy, effortless catharsis; (3) sweet kitsch serves as an aphrodisiac, a means of self enjoyment; and (4) sweet kitsch reassures itself to its audience" (Higgins 1992: 568).

Though many of Higgins' criticisms of sweet kitsch are explicit in the above description of the supposed benefits of the sentimentalised, it still may seem difficult (and perhaps unnecessary) to fault sentimentality and its imagery if it really does have the power to make its indulgees feel that good. The essence of the faults found in sentimentality, however, lie in Higgins's imperative first point: the sentimentalist's exclusion of all things intolerable. Sentimentality hides more about the world than it reveals, sentimental texts lead the reader astray, away from reality towards unmitigated happiness and blind contentment. In essence, sentimentality is false and manipulative.

More than masking personal sincerity, sentimentality can hide the realities of a political, racial or even private truth merely to suit the whim of the sentimentalist. "The construction a sentimentalist puts on a theme is not truthful, not the one an unneeded observer would put on it. [...] the sentimentalist will select, idealise (or vilify), sanitise, embroider and even fantasise, as necessary" (Pugmire 2005:127-8). The sentimentalist does not just lie to make her listeners feel happier, but rather to engender the emotions she needs to feel better about herself. Thus, sentimentality is described also as inherently self-indulgent, narcissistic even, whereby the purveyor and the consumer of sentimentality must focus only on their own emotional sanctity, interfering with what Robert C Solomon suggests is appropriate and considerate adult behaviour (1991: 5).

Anthony Savile and countless other (mostly male) writers have assured us that sentimentality, then, is "always open to criticism. There is always something wrong with it" (2007: 315). It is certainly difficult to fault the idea that there is *sometimes* something very wrong with sentimentality in that it can indeed mask the harsh realities and complexities of a situation – simplifying real emotion to triteness. Hallmark's new Journey© range of greeting cards, for example, function almost as parodies of the sentimental in their ridiculous platitudes. This new range features 'get well soon' variations for people dealing with "tackling cancer diagnoses, quitting smoking, caring for an aged parent, miscarriage, anniversaries of loss, loved ones in the military, and traumatic loss, such as someone dying in an accident or homicide" (Associated Press 2007: Online). The cards contain sensitive (often rhyming) texts such as: "cancer is a villain who doesn't play fair ... but it can't dim your spirit, and it can't silence prayer" (Ibid.). This example of hyper-sentimentality, and many like it (including 'chick flicks' and patriotic war movies featuring the glory of neatly bloodied soldiers), is undoubtedly abhorrent in its plundering of real emotional distress (and in other cases events and histories).

That said, however, many of the overarching criticisms of sentimentality seem to rest in a painfully logical and particularly gendered criticism of emotion itself, viewed in opposition to the supposedly more valid (and supposedly more male) lauding of reason. When discussing the flaws of the sentimentalist, Savile describes how "a man whose grief, anger, or love is sentimental will tend to resist the correction of the thought on which his emotion rests, and this very recalcitrance suggests that what holds the thought in place is not a desire for truth and knowledge but something else – a desire that can be satisfied by seeing the object in a false light" (2007: 316). This is in contrast to his own undoubtedly true and virtuous character which he describes as such: "when it is pointed out to me that [a belief of mine] is false or that I am not justified in holding it, I shall abandon it or at least suspend belief. If nothing else sustains such errors than my desire rationally to believe what is true, they die a reasonably swift death" (Ibid.). Thus, were Savile, for example, to feel love for one who subsequently failed to display any tenderness towards him, he would then (understanding his own sentiment to be false) swiftly cease to care. Newman, however, criticises this damning of emotion, which implies that holding onto memory, love and sadness is "false" and immoral. Instead, she suggests that abandoning one's emotions is actually an "egoistic desentimentation (sic)" (Newman 2007: 327) that is untrue to oneself, dodging real feeling and failing both to confront emotion and deal fully with painful realisations or events. In other words, Newman argues that the total avoidance of sentimentality is, in fact, false. This criticism is echoed in Pugmire's comparison of sentimentality and cynicism, wherein he states that "cynics direct a cold stare at evidence conducive to a desirable emotion, where sentimentalists avert their eyes from evidence not conducive to it. Cynicism saves us from sentimentality" (Pugmire 2005: 147). Suggesting that sentimentality at its worst and the dryness of cynicism are in fact analogous, Pugmire continues: "now the fact that the cynic ventures to disbelieve (rather than suspend judgment about or accept provisionally), and to do so indefinitely, means that his policy is dogmatic, a kind of inverted faith. It turns out, then, that the position of the cynic is not so different in structure from that of the naïf who settles for the benefit of doubt straight away" (2005:149).

Other than the accusation of falseness, the chief criticism aimed at sentimentality is that of passivity, a quality that has been established earlier in this document as one that is paramount to the general understanding of women. "In [Oscar] Wilde's words, sentimentalists desire 'to have the luxury of an emotion without having to pay for it'" (Newman 2007:325) or, when discussing the lack of action defined by the sentimentalist's response, "sentimentality may offer me the added advantage that I may not need to go and actually do anything about it" (Savile 2007: 316). Thus, sentimentality is defined as an 'armchair emotion', where the sentimentalist experiences emotion vicariously without having to leave the comfort of her own home or stable emotional state. While this may often be the case (as with the Hallmark cards and "sob story" movies mentioned earlier), in other instances, for example when the sentimentalist dwells on emotions or events in order to work through them, there is "an *expense* of mental and moral energy for the person responding" (Newman 2007: 328) that suggests action rather than the passivity

that is suggested in Savile's denial of emotion. The link between sentimentality and crafts, in particular those traditionally defined as women's crafts such as embroidery, quilting, scrap-booking and so on, is also one that shows that sentimentality often depends on action to manifest itself, making memory, loss or memorials concrete through labour. Thus, sentimentality is not always passive, nor is the woman who keeps her love letters, embroiders memorial quilts or spends hours looking through her photograph album. While sentimentality can indeed be escapist, trite and abhorrent, it is also often a valid and active response to an emotion or event.

KITSCH

Kitsch may be conveniently defined as a specifically aesthetic form of lying (Greenberg 1939: 10).

Greenberg defined kitsch as the enemy of the truth-seeking modernist ethos, a "rear-garde" that, unlike the heady ideals of modernity, "pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money, not even their time" (Greenberg 1939: 10). Although the etymology of kitsch is often debated, the accepted derivation is from the German *verkitschen* or "make cheap". The word was first used in the late 1800s by German art dealers to designate "cheap artistic stuff" (Calinescu 1977:234), and it was only in the twentieth century that the term kitsch started being used internationally.

It is not surprising then that this modern term used to define something primarily as cheap (and easy) should find favour in the postmodern era, where notions of class-based distinctions are contested and much that was integral to modernity - progress, purity and artistic genius - is questioned. "The postmodernists have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch [...]: materials they no longer "quote," as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance" (Jameson 1991:2-3).

Kitsch then, more than the sentimental or the nostalgic, is an aesthetic concept, and one that is already quite firmly entrenched in art discourse. What makes something kitsch is a base appeal, a simplicity and brutality, an assault on the senses that is often evoked by multiplication. Kitsch lies, kitsch fakes and kitsch cheapens, often through the language of the copy - the Mona Lisa only becomes kitsch in her infinite manifestations. Kitsch becomes a useful language within the arts when the subject it describes is the very lies that kitsch sells - those of love, contentment and easy access to both the sublime and the beautiful - in a contemporary landscape that is defined (as discussed further in this chapter) by the language of the copy.

NOSTALGIA

Although nostalgia is strongly linked to sentimentality, it has a pathos that is less evident in the sweetness of the sentimental. Nostalgia abhors progress, "mistrusts the future" (Lowenthal 1985:11) and more than that, the nostalgic fears the present, cocooning herself in the apparent safety of an imagined, placeless past.

Nostalgia was coined as a medical term in 1688 to describe a potentially fatal case of homesickness. In 1873 nostalgia was defined as a contagious disorder with the potential to spread tragically through army induction centers, and it still appeared on the Surgeon General's list of standard illnesses during the Second World War (Lowenthal 1985:11).

Though today nostalgia may not be classified as a pathological illness, it is still perhaps a dangerous condition. The suggestion of a better past, or a nowhere-place 'in the good old days' negates the realities of oppression, racism, sexism and the general unpleasantness of certain times in history. These histories and all that can be learnt from them are then replaced with an unfocussed, fuzzy need to go back there, without any knowledge of where, exactly, there is.

As Lowenthal states, "mistrust of the future also fuels today's nostalgia. We may not love the past excessively as many did in the nineteenth century, but our misgivings about what may come are more grave" (1985:11). Nostalgia was last this big at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the uncertainty of our new century, and indeed millennium, causes what Dr. Barbara Stern refers to as the "fine de siècle affect", where "cultural anxiety about the experience of discontinuity" (1992: Online) causes a social uncertainty that reassures itself by looking back.

Older people have a reason to be nostalgic. Most of their lives are behind them. That young people are looking over their shoulder so much is a sign of underconfidence, I think. The reassuring thing about the past is that we already know the outcome. (O'Neil 2004: Online).

As asserted in the above quotation, many would assume that the aged lean more towards nostalgia. The nostalgic tendency, however, is prevalent not only in the work of many young artists, but in the stylings of youth culture, corporate production and mass media. Hasbro recently re-launched the My Little Pony doll. Transformers have become collectors' items and have begun appearing in advertisements for cars that the children who played with them can now afford. Eighties music has made an huge comeback, and Hello Kitty, cutesy dresses and designer toys are aimed at a culture of young adults. Thus, young people are not only being sold nostalgia, they are happily buying into it in a desperate attempt to cling to their recent childhoods.

In looking back at the origins of the word's usage, however, nostalgia's affliction in young people becomes clearer. As opposed to the ancient grandmother, the youth still feel the wound of their responsibility and independence. More recently thrown from the

womb of (remembered) carelessness, the twenty-something particularly is new to the sense of alienation, discomfort and displacement in the world, with the homesickness of nostalgia an unsurprising symptom of this malady.

Born perhaps of fear, and rife amongst young people, the millennial nostalgia movement has come with a particularly anti-feminist backlash. For, after all, if nostalgia is a longing to "return home", then there had better be a woman there waiting with a warm dinner. The fact that nostalgia has seeped into every facet of popular culture, sub-cultural style and political sensibility, has allowed for a call to return to 'old fashioned' ideals that often equate to dangerous regressions in notions of sexual difference and womanhood.

With American president George Bush's consistent calls for the return of the nuclear family and images of 60s housewives selling trendy products in the city centre in 2008, nostalgia seems to have trumped irony with a resurgence of anti-feminist sentiment and the re-emergence of the idea that it is only behind great men that great women lurk. Oprah Talk Show cast-off and award winning author and T.V. pop psychologist, Dr. Phil, has a wife who dutifully walks out and holds his hand at the end of every daily show. Her description on both their websites begins: "Robin McGraw, wife of best-selling author and television talk Showhost Dr. Phil McGraw, has made "family first" her mission. Married for 31 years to Dr. Phil, whom she fondly refers to as "Phillip", Robin has made her marriage and raising their two sons Jay, 28, and Jordan, 21, her priority in life".¹¹

While mothering is by no means an unimportant position for women, this daytime television show (which is watched by millions) seems in many ways to be an extension of the recent resurgence in nostalgic and near-sighted wishes to return to the 'good old days' when men were gentlemen and women were happy mothers and housewives who didn't have the unnecessary pressure of having to vote or work. This trend is particularly evident in an alarming resurgence in literature extolling the virtues of housework and motherhood over careers and ambition, typified by Danielle Crittenden, whose column and eventual book on the joys of housewifery, *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman* (2000), led to Erica Jong describing her as "ignorant" and Betti Friedan calling her "anti-woman" (Thomas 2003: Online). The link between this new kind of anti-feminism and the millennial love of nostalgia is an important one, where gender politics mesh with popular sensibilities and trends: "Crittenden has achieved fame in an era of nostalgia worship. Swing dancing, lounge music, and vintage shopping are today's retro fads. Crittenden and her antifeminist sisters are there to provide political views that won't clash with that smashing '50s dress" (Lipman 1999: Online).

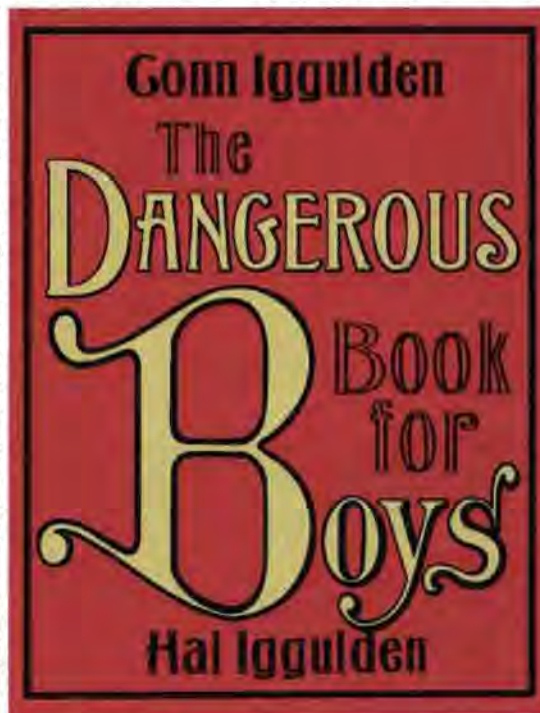
A reasonably unconcerned Sunday Times writer described Crittenden and her ilk, "a new kind of post-feminist is emerging that would have the suffragettes turning in

their graves" (Thomas 2003: Online). Of course, post-feminist here means only "after feminism", where gender studies, activism and women's struggles under patriarchy have, apparently, ended. To quote a young woman I went to school with when I ran into her at a club recently, "I mean I'm glad Feminism happened and all, I'm just glad it's all over now".¹²

Children's literature has long been critiqued for its binary representations of boys and girls. In many ways, this literature and the gendered toys and dress that accompany it are one of the guiding factors in little girls' (and boys') lives as they learn to enact their gender. As nostalgia is particularly embedded in childhood imagery, little boys with guns and girls with baking trays and aprons have been playing on cool kids' shirts, party flyers and in savvy artists'

repertoires for over a decade. While one might assume that these representations from not too distant childhoods are imbued with at least a hint of irony, a recent bestseller (with over half a million sales in the UK alone) rests at the apex of problems with nostalgia and sexual difference. In 2006, brothers Conn and Hal Iggulden published *The Dangerous Book For Boys*, a book championed for the return of old fashioned values and adventurous harmless fun for boys, as well as championing chivalry and gentlemanly behaviour in its young readers. Filled with undeniably fun guides to tying knots and making sailboats, the book also includes helpful advice on dealing with girls: "in one grating passage, boys are encouraged to carry a handkerchief, among other things, for "offering one to a girl

when she cries." Boys are reminded not to make a girl feel stupid if she needs help, but nothing is said about the possibility of accepting help from a girl, or losing gracefully if bested by a girl at some "boy" activity" (Young 2007: Online). Meanwhile, happy in their reminiscence, fathers (and mothers) triumph this tome as "a healthy swing of



Cover Illustration
Conn and Hal Iggulden. 2006. *The Dangerous Book For Boys*. UK & USA: HarperCollins.

¹¹ See: http://www.drphil.com/shows/page/robin_bio/ and http://www.robinmcgraw.com/meet_robin.htm. 23.10.08

¹² Personal communication. 2008.

the pendulum away from 20th century post-Christian sensitive new-age-guy feminist parenting" (Shearer 2008: Online).

While nostalgia as a personal malady can lead to crying when listening to bad pop songs in public and forgetting how awful high school was, as a greater social malady it remains exceptionally dangerous, and certainly not just for boys.

ROMANCE

A cynic is just a disappointed romantic (Nietzsche in Pugmire, 2005: 145).

Romance is what becomes of love when she is strung through the wash of sentimentality. In its idealisation and sanitation of heterosexual relations, romance becomes the currency that sells love and sex to women and young girls, and leaves us all (if Nietzsche is to be believed) drowning in cynicism.

In *Becoming a Woman through Romance*, Christian-Smith presents a study of the role of romance novels in the lives of adolescent girls, a discussion that is as relevant to the (often tiringly adolescent) romance media sold to women. In it, she lists the codes of romance as they appear in the texts she discusses:

Romance is a market relationship

Romance is a heterosexual practice

Romance manages sexuality while privileging non-genital forms of sexual expression

Romance is a transforming experience giving meaning to heroines' lives and endowing heroines with prestige

Romance is about the dominance of men and the subordination of women (1990:17)

That romance is a market relationship (as well as a market-driven phenomenon) suggests that within romance "the interactions between girlfriends and boyfriends can be regarded as transactions that are coded to the gender qualities each brings to romance. The feminine terms involve fidelity and devotion, which are exchanged for the support and prestige one has as the girlfriend of a popular boy" (Christian-Smith 1990: 18). In this model, the heroines of the story are required only *not* to cheat on their boyfriends and *not* to think of anything besides them. Again, the passivity of the heroine (if in doing very little she can be described as such) is central to her character. This passivity is further demonstrated in the heroine's role within prospective sexual relationships with her boy, where "in their world proper femininity requires a certain passiveness" (Christian-Smith 1990: 33). Adolescent girls (as in real life) are actively discouraged from ever being too forward or, God forbid, initiating any kind of romantic or sexual first move. In a further trade off, though sex proper is generally discouraged in teen romance novels, it is often discussed as something that is expected of girls in return for their status as some boy's girlfriend. This particular trade off is further emphasised in hugely popular teen magazines such as *Just Seventeen* and *Bliss* where, although girls'

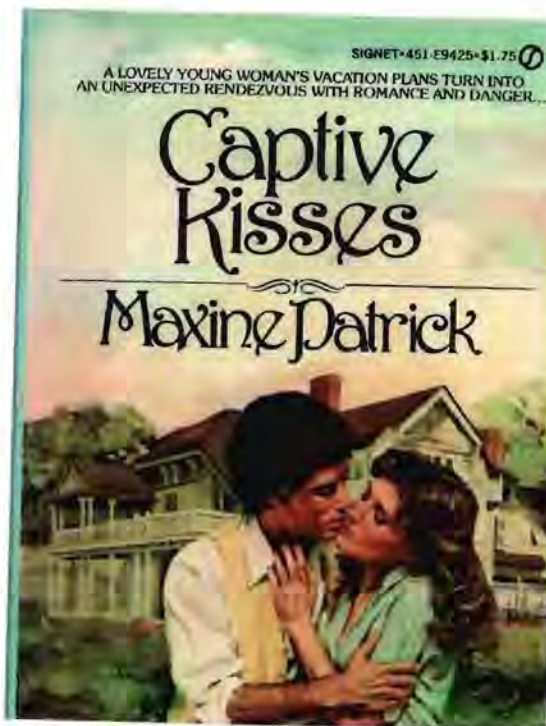
are reaffirmed of their right to refuse sex, they are certainly never the ones asking for it; and where "girls reading about boys' obsession with losing their virginity may consider that sex is the price of going out with a boy" (Mellanby 1996: Online).

Christian-Smith's study of adolescent romance novels suggests that this fiction "presents a virtually heterosexual universe" (1997: 20). Adult romance novels similarly present men as the heroine's reward. Teen magazines, which function as important guides in the lives of adolescent girls, also presume heterosexuality in their readers, at most suggesting lesbianism in schoolgirls as an inevitable, but passing phase. *Seventeen* magazine's website for example has a "Guys" section in which is included all of their relationship advice as well as a "build a boyfriend" (Seventeen 2008: Online) application, keeping romantic fantasies firmly within the heterosexual realm. Adult magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* also present only heterosexual sex suggestions in its "Sex" section, which includes a "Guy Candy" image gallery (Cosmopolitan 2008: Online). Similarly, the vast majority of movies, television shows, novels and even music videos suggest heterosexuality as the only real option for romance, unless they are labelled specifically as 'gay' programming or literature. As this paper is written with a self-consciously heteronormative bias, it is not within its scope to consider further the worrisome implications of this facet of romance; however, it is worth noting as it is indicative of the fact that romance functions as a boundary which only allows very specific kinds of sexual practices, when it permits any at all.

Indeed, romantic fiction views sex as something best avoided, legitimising only "non genital" forms of sexuality (Christian-Smith 1990: 23) such as kissing and the occasional clothed fondling. Even these relatively chaste encounters are only permitted within already established romantic relationships, after sufficient courting by the boy and pious patience on the behalf of his courtess. "In the romantic world, kisses do not come before love, unless they are offered by wicked men who delude innocent girls for a time [...]", writes Germaine Greer (1971:193). Sex itself is warned as dangerous and frightening for girls; Christian-Smith quotes the 1968 novel, *Drop Out*: "sex is like a kitten [adolescent girls] can take out of a little box to play with, then put it back when they're through. Too late they discover they've got a tiger on their hands" (Eyerly in Christian-Smith 1990: 33). There is a generally an understanding here that girls could not possibly *want* a tiger in their bedrooms, a presumption that I, certainly, would question. The power that girls have over boys in the romantic model rests firstly in coy seduction, but then finds its apex in their refusal to have sex; where "saying no" becomes their only real sexual agency. This reticence also becomes the way that girls manage to 'keep' their boyfriends, giving meaning to their otherwise purposeless lives as prey.

Girls, and the women they become, are expected to view sex as something that they must resist succumbing to, and if eventually they do succumb, it is only within the ritual of romance that they do so willingly. "Settings, clothes, objects, all testify to the ritualisation of sex which is the essential character of romance" (Greer 1971: 205). A picnic at sunset, flowers, pet names, adorations and heart shaped chocolates are all

markers of what is supposed to be real adoration, the kind that transforms fucking to making love and makes succumbing to sex an acceptable eventuality. Germaine Greer pointedly notes that most men who adopt this kind of behaviour do so only through careful study and quite possibly to dubious ends. "Mystery, magic, champagne, ceremony, tenderness, excitement, adoration, reverence – women never have enough of it. Most men know nothing about this female fantasy as they are not exposed to this kind of literature" (1971:194).



Cover Illustration
Maxine Patrick 1982 *Captive Kisses*. London: New Amer Library

and women cling to are echoed by their choices in partners and within relationships. Greer suggests that the traits of the romantic hero "have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage" (Greer 1971:202), those women who continue to long for a big strong man to come and sweep them, trembling and powerless, off their feet. Although real boys (and men) fail to ever live up to the romantic hero, the act of chivalry, of paternalism, of romance; is one that is played by men everywhere in order to win over their conquest. Thus, the romantic paperbacks read by housewives are by no means the seemingly harmless escapist fantasies they are proffered as, but rather echo the patriarchal system to which housewives are already bound. In young girls,

Though few men claim to understand the kind of romance that women want, as a cultural code romance is undoubtedly about male domination. Sexuality, as has been discussed "is subverted by a common convention of romance fiction: the weary capitulation of the heroine to the masterful hero" (Christian-Smith 1997:35); and girls passivity is lauded within the codes of romance. The kind of hero that belongs to both adolescent and adult romance novels is protective and kind yet dangerous, considerate though dashing, strong but gentle, older than the heroine, always chivalrous and "patently paternal" (Greer 1971: 196). It is in the behaviour of the romantic hero and his heroine, waiting longingly in "masochistic reverie" (Greer 1971: 201), that we find romance's effect, for the fictions that girls grow up with

romance functions as the very strict rulebook by which ideas about love and sex are learnt. Romance, then, is by no means harmless or simple, its tomes denying women and girls both agency and sexual pleasure within heterosexual relationships.

A NOTE ON THE HYPERREAL

Much of the critique of sentimentality is rooted within accusations of fakery, a move away from the real towards insincere, false emotions. According to Greenberg, "kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations" (1939: 10). Kitsch, as already discussed, exists often only in the copy, a product of excess and over consumption. "The need for kitsch arises when genuine emotion has become rare, when desire lies dormant and needs artificial stimulation" (Harries 1968: 77). Thus, kitsch is a response to a lack of real feeling, suggesting that the postmodern climate in which kitsch is so rife, is devoid of such sentiment. Nostalgia too is clearly about falsification; the past, present and even future, and its postmodern proliferation can be read in part as a response to the contemporary climate of fear and of rapid technological, environmental and political change that contributes to the fragmentation of self. "In a world of loss and unreality nostalgia rises to importance as 'the phantasmal, parodic rehabilitation of all lost frames of reference'" (Stewart 1988: 228¹³).

Romance has been discussed in this paper almost solely in terms of fiction. However, "although romance is essentially vicarious the potency of the fantasy distorts actual behaviour" (Greer 1971:203), where life (boys opening doors for giggling girls) imitates art (romance novels of chivalrous, dreamy heroes), which imitates the social constructions of gender, which are too rooted in fiction.

Sentimentality, kitsch and romance exist in the realm of the fake, rather than representing real emotion or artefacts, they simulate them in a copy that is often hard to trace to any real referent: "simulation is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard 1988: 169). The hyperreal defines postmodernism's proliferation of simulacra - signs without signifiers; the copy of a copy of a copy that negates any meaningful notion of the real itself. Jameson describes one of the "constitutive features of the postmodern: a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation [...] in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (Jameson 1991:6). The proliferation of representations and new digitisations of knowledge that mark postmodernity thus result in a democratisation of information which functions to flatten meaning and destabilise notions of truth and authenticity. Baudrillard describes Disneyland as "a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation" (1988:174). Rife with excessive embodiments of kitsch, sentimentality, nostalgia and romance (*Sleeping Beauty* is the ultimate passive woman, and *necrophiliac's* fantasy), Disneyland is an obvious example of illusion and

13 Quoting Foster, H. 1985. 'Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics'. Washington: Bay Press. (90)

fakery. Disneyland, however, is also important to the country it inhabits, mirroring the constructed ideologies and idealisms of the United States of America. "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but the order of the hyperreal and of hyperreality and simulation" (Baudrillard 1988: 175). Thus, Disneyland functions to hide the fakeness of the rest of the world, with constructions of unreality that can be clearly recognised as such, placating its revellers and masking any kind of stable reference point in the 'real world' outside the theme park's gates.

The consumer driven culture of late capitalism that encourages mass production creates a world where infinite copies are the norm, transforming both elite cultural productions (like the Mona Lisa) and the banal (like puppies) into cheap objects of kitsch. Similarly, sentimentality and romance are sold in easily available, cheap paperbacks and magazines, on television and in advertising to a population (mostly of women) searching for emotion in an increasingly alienated and fragmented universe. Nostalgia, the longing for a simpler, better past, is a defining symptom of the postmodern condition: "when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its true meaning" (Baudrillard 1988: 174).

Despite the realities of war, loss and violence, sentimentality in all its forms remains a signifier of postmodernity, sought after in political, popular and personal realms, while dangerously codifying cultural practices and human relationships. In addition to being symptomatic of the contemporary climate, sentimentality, nostalgia and romance are all highly gendered terms, vilifying supposed feminine qualities while simultaneously reinforcing dangerous stereotypes about women.

THERE'S NO SEX IN YOUR VIOLENCE¹⁴

VIOLENCE, SEX, MASOCHISM AND HORROR

As I see it, our revolutionary task is to destroy phallic identity in men and masochistic non-identity in women--that is, to destroy the polar realities of men and women as we now know them so that this division of human flesh into two camps--one an armed camp and the other a concentration camp--is no longer possible. Phallic identity is real and it must be destroyed. Female masochism is real and it must be destroyed (Dworkin 1976: 81).

I've already told you: the only way to a woman's heart is along the path of torment. I know none other as sure (De Sade 1987 [1758]: 701).

Male dominance has already been established within an inevitable circular causal relationship to codes of biological sexual difference -- to the positive penis in relation to the negative of the vagina. Thus, domination and control are explicitly linked to sexuality, with the heterosexual sex act itself a colonisation with vast potential for violence. Sadomasochism (SM) appears as the literal embodiment of the positive/neutral, aggressor/victim dualities established by the heterosexual relationship, making explicit the violence implicit in intercourse. Unlike actual sexual violence, however, sadomasochism acts within the real of the simulation, the play and the unreal, and as such should not necessarily be damned as merely a validation of extreme forms of real sexual violence. Self-mutilation in young girls, while a destructive impulse, also breaks the cycle of victim/aggressor, sadist/masochist, with teenagers asserting their subjectivity even as they attack it. Horror movies, in particular the slasher genre, are obsessed with the link between death and sex. Sexy young women run screaming from pointy phalluses, only to be penetrated again and again as hot sticky blood ejaculates all over their perfectly made-up faces.

SEX AND MALE VIOLENCE

Romance places women as always waiting, with no sexual drive of their own, like deer caught in the headlights who eventually succumb to their pursuers, only to be hit by the full force of the 'monster truck' of male sexuality. The Freudian model of psychoanalysis establishes the phallus as the primary signifier, the penis that every girl desires, herself only a hole, useless and waiting to be filled. Male domination is intrinsically linked then to the penis, and to the sex act itself.

We're all terrorised about a range of possible ways that violence is done to us, whether its rape or being beat up on the streets or whatever. We're all in the state of severe intimidation, and that's a very powerful and strong feeling (Rubin 1982: 45).



Richard Keppel Smith Runway 2007
fashion shoot (page 6 of 9 page spread)

I believe firmly in the possibility of an empowered female sexuality within heterosexual relations and am particularly wary of placing women, and myself, as victims within intercourse¹⁵. However, as a woman (particularly living in South Africa) I am also aware of the constant fear of sexual violence, or forced penetration, a fear that comes (or came for me) simultaneously with the realisation of sexual pleasure as a teenager¹⁶. Women fear rape, and fear men's capacity for sexual violence. While rape is too a terrifying reality for men, it is still (almost always) men who are the perpetrators of sexual violence, and fear is not a codified part of male conceptions of heterosexual sex. In women, however, sex and violence are always linked in a pervasive fear of sexual abuse. "Once you permit yourself to be perceived as a sexual creature, then you become open territory, open prey. Actual sexual violence oppresses us" (English 1982: 45). This fearful position, even though it relates specifically to sexual abuse, is intrinsically linked to the fact that men *can* 'take advantage' of women, through their superior physical strength and through the social and biological realities of penetration.

If the sexual relation appears as a social relation of domination, this is because it is constructed through the fundamental principal of division between the active male and the passive female and because this principle creates, organises, expresses and directs desire – male desire for the desire for possession, eroticised domination, and female desire as the desire for masculine domination, as eroticised subordination [...] (Bordieu 1998: 21).

If, as the once popular (though out of date) slogan suggests, "feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice"¹⁷, heterosexual sex, it would follow, is the practice of the theory of patriarchy: "compared to other systems of dominance, male dominance uniquely involves 'interior colonisation' (by which [Millet])¹⁸ presumably means penile penetration)" (Hester 1992:45). Thus colonisation, and by extension invasion, are established as analogous to the act of penetration. The colonial, warring metaphor is pervasive not only because of presumptions of male aggression as a defining character trait, nor only because sex, relationships and marriage often imply male ownership of women, but also because war and sexual violence are intrinsically linked, with rape a deeply embedded wartime strategy. "Violence against women in conflict situations assumes many forms; rape is often only one of the ways in which women are targeted. But while other abuses, such as murder and other forms of torture have long been denounced as war crimes, 'rape has been downplayed as an unfortunate but inevitable

15 This discussion is crystallised in my conversations around the work *Wanted* (pg. 79-101), which was criticised in terms of my own victimisation within sexual relationships, and in the victimisation of the men who I fucked, and who fucked me.

16 Note illustration on page 38, *Just Relax* This composite of drawings of pornography, overlaid with stock photography of a seemingly harmless couple kissing, overlaid again with a killed shark (one needs to excuse my adolescent signifiers), was executed when I was 16, shortly after I 'lost' my virginity (to a boyfriend who loved and respected me), and also soon after my first experience of attempted sexual abuse – a typical story of a drunk older boy on a dark beach who tried to 'go too far'.

17 This slogan popular with Feminists in the seventies has been attributed, originally to Ti Grace Atkinson, though the details are sketchy, it apparently first appeared in a 1971 Chicago Women's Liberation Union pamphlet.

18 Millet, J. 1971. *Women's Estate*. London: Penguin.

side effect of sending men to war" (Thomas & Reagan 1994: Online). Sending men to war against other men, then, "inevitably" leads to violence against women. Rape is used as a wartime strategy by invading armies in part to drive women, families and communities out of their homes through fear of their attackers (ibid.). The effect of rape in war, however, is not that it harms or scares women who are raped, but rather that it destroys communities unable to protect 'their' women: "soldiers can succeed in translating the attack upon an individual woman into an assault upon her community because of the emphasis placed - in every culture in the world - on women's sexual purity and the fact that societies define themselves, in overt or less clear-cut fashions, relative to their ability to protect and control that purity" (Thomas & Reagan 1994: Online). Thus, rape in war is viewed not as a brutal and humiliating attack on individual women, but as one in a barrage of weapons against communities, suggested here as a paternalistic patriarchal force, insulted for his inability to protect the women who are his charge. Thus in war, the rape of women is used as a crime against men. Like the pillaging that so often goes hand in hand with rape, sexual abuse against women is successful in battle as it causes damage to male property; rape is an offence to ownership - often claimed initially through consensual sex.

In rape, then, the penis is literally used as a weapon, substituting the gun (which often is literally used to rape women in wartime). "The idea of interior colonisation also links to a related aspect of male sexuality - the idea of a penis as weapon. To use the penis, which is probably the most vulnerable part of the male anatomy, as a weapon seems ridiculous. But in rape that is precisely what men are doing" (Hester 1992: 45). If the penis is capable of being used as a weapon, as it is in rape, then male sexuality is defined, undeniably, as potentially dangerous to women.

In no way am I trying to claim that all sex between men and women is tantamount to rape (as Andrea Dworkin was famously miscredited as suggesting). However the fact of sexual abuse demonstrates that men are certainly capable of violently *using* sex and *using* women to establish dominance. In returning to the pervasive androcentric definition of sex as penetration and male orgasm (Maines 2001: 5), consensual sex (when it follows this definition) too can be read as implicitly violent, where men use women as vessels to achieve pleasure. Men enter the women they are fucking; they invade, they possess. That virility, strength, bravery and aggression are all equally linked as important traits of masculinity suggests more than a passing link between male violence and sexuality. Traditionally, "most men conceive [of sex] in terms of conquest (especially in terms of conversations between friends, which give a prominent place to boasting about female conquests)" (Bourdieu 2000: 20). This suggests that in everyday sexual relationships men claim masculine power as predators - able to conquer women *and* then have the agency and vocabulary to discuss their adventures with their male friends.

"*Manliness*, understood as sexual or social reproductive capacity, but also as the capacity to fight and exercise violence [...], is first and foremost a *duty*" (Bourdieu 2000: 51). Male sexuality, as defined in the romance novels discussed earlier, is linked

to strength and to violence, and is indeed to be feared. The sex act itself, when it follows the standard code of men fucking women, is both product and cause of the patriarchal model established within discussions of Freudian psychoanalysis, leaving women passive, disempowered and open to physical and emotional abuse. "In other words, sexual relations both reflect and serve to maintain women's subordination" (Richardson 2000: 75).

SADOMASOCHISM

Sex is, like all practices between a self and an other, about power, and thus maintains potential for domination.¹⁹ Power, as already discussed, is linked within masculinity to aggression; thus, beneath the heterosexual sex act is an underlying theme of violence. Sadomasochistic practices, which take place between the sadist (who's desire is to inflict pain on an other) and the masochist (who's desire is to submit to the abuse of an other) present an eroticisation of violent sexual power relations. Sadomasochism is the consensual eroticisation of sexual abuse. As such, many feminists deplore sadomasochism, even amongst lesbians, as an eroticisation and validation of patriarchal power relations, making explicit and permissible the violence inherent in heterosexual relations.

The primary claim of [feminists against sadomasochism] is that the eroticisation of violence or domination, and of pain or powerlessness, is at the core of sadomasochism and, consequently that the practices of sadomasochism embodies the same value as heterosexual practices of sexual domination in general and sexually violent practices like rape in particular (Bar On 1982: 75).

Certainly the relationship between sadist and masochist, master and slave, 'on top' or tied down; all appear as extreme enactments of Bourdieu's discussion of patriarchal sex relations, where male sexuality is defined as the need to control, and women's the desire to submit - extremities of "eroticised domination" and "eroticised submission" (Bourdieu 1998: 21). Any activity that copies these models so blatantly is thought to "replicate patriarchal value, patriarchal desire, patriarchal behaviour. That the practice might include the participation of lesbians does nothing to alter the interpretation - it still replicates the structure of masculine desire" (Hopkins 1994: 192). Sadomasochism, both in practice and in its imagery (which may often leak into mainstream press in the form of bound, dominated, unclothed women), is often viewed as both a product and encouragement of violent, unconsensual sexual practices including battery and rape.

The argument that SM, unlike other kinds of interpersonal violence, is consensual, seems to fall short of a validation of this kind of sexual practice. As Butler commented, "that sm (sic) requires consent does not mean that it has overcome heterosexual power dynamics. Women have been consenting to heterosexual power dynamics for thousands of years" (1982: 172). That women consent to male domination surely does not deny

19 This follows Foucault's model of the relationship between power, knowledge and sexuality, particularly as established in *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

the problematic notions of patriarchy. However, what is missing from this argument is the notion firstly, of will vs. consent. SM is still a relatively underground practice, and surely women who choose to enact their fantasies of submission (and domination) are enabled actors of their own sexual desire. The counter to this, that women's desire is codified as this very desire for submission, also begs the question of the female sadist, or dominatrix: "[women] sadomasochists speak of enjoying the role of 'on top' (sadist), dominating and receiving sexual service because it goes against all we were taught as women about lying back and thinking of England in exchange for security with the chance of the added extra of romance" (France 1984: 37). Sadomasochism functions within the bounds of male vs. female, active vs. passive, domination vs. dominated, in a most literal embodiment. However, with the option of actively choosing which gender role to assimilate, sadomasochism is, perhaps, "a reaction to living under patriarchy and not a reflection of it" (France 1984: 40). Sadomasochism is necessarily a product of patriarchy (which establishes the binary gender relations that it essentialises), but as opposed to merely re-iterating these boundaries, it plays within them in a spectacle of patriarchy, where women are finally allowed to play the main part.

Hopkins argues that the most valid defence of sadomasochism is in its contextual framework as spectacle, as performance, or as play (1994: 196 – 199). Sadomasochism happens not only between consensual parties, but also between parties who are both, albeit in different roles, active in the construction of their fantasies. Negotiation of setting and costume, or an establishment of a 'safe word' that allows the 'victim' to end the act at anytime, means that sex happens on a stage of fantasies established by both parties prior to its enactment. Thus, even as she may be playing the ultimate victim, the masochist within SM is not one; she has agency, a voice that is often denied within more normalised heterosexual practices. Though the relationship between sadomasochism and male domination and violence may appear simple – an image of a half naked woman bound and whipped certainly perpetuates ideals of violent domination – the practice of sadomasochism bears a complex relation to women's agency. Despite becoming increasingly mainstream, images of sadomasochism are still read as deviant unlike common pop culture images of thinly (or not even) veiled rape and brutality fantasies – considerably more damaging to women in their permissiveness of sexual violence.²⁰

And although sadomasochism involves real pain (which can be stopped at any point), it is largely about playing roles, playing within patriarchy: "SM is constructed as a performance, as a staging, a production, a simulation in which participants are writers, producers, directors, actors and audience" (Hopkins 1994: 196). In the simulation of sexual power relations, sadomasochism enters the realm of the hyperreal, an arena where intensified simulation both reveals and perhaps subverts the power dynamics of patriarchy.

²⁰ See illustration on pg 32: a page of a fashion shoot taken from One Small Seed (Giuseppe 2007: 28 – 30): "the South African contemporary culture magazine".

SELF MUTILATION

Self-harm, in particular 'cutting', is considerably more prevalent amongst adolescent girls than boys and has become increasingly common in the last two decades.²¹ Considering the gendered power dynamics discussed thus far, and the pressures of love and romance foisted on teenage girls in countless fictions and glossy teen magazines, it is hardly surprising that the onset of womanhood leads to a distrust of the self. The passivity required within sexual relations in this pervasive model presumes "a kind of masochism inherent in [women's] nature" (Bourdieu 2000: 40). This masochism, fostered by pressures of becoming 'woman' (as she is defined through patriarchy), is manifested literally in the teenage girl's desire to self-harm. Masochism, however, traditionally requires an other, a sadist to dominate and negate the masochist's subjectivity. Self-mutilation, however, is a closed circuit of submission and domination – where the perpetrator simultaneously asserts and negates her own subjectivity, assuming agency while still attacking the self.

razorbladebloodstainedmirror

enchanted mirror -
you show me what i want to see
what i need to be
- i find you in razorblades and kitchen knives

i don't know why i bleed for you
why i bleed for me
why i bleed to see
some faint and fadin' signs of life
[...]

but then again-
you're my own reflection
my very own spiritual infection
and as i stain you with my blood you know
[...] (Ashleigh: Online)

In *razorbladebloodstainedmirror*, one of countless adolescent poems about cutting, the author explicitly links the notion of the mirror and self-mutilation, stating that it is her reflection (separated from her self) that she is both attacking and wielding as her weapon.

²¹ See: Pipher, M. 1994. Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls. New York: Ballantine Books.
Cerdorian, K. 2005. The Needs of Adolescent Girls who Self-Harm. Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services. 2005, Vol. 43 No. 8. (40 – 46).
Suyemoto, K. L. & MacDonald, M. 1995. Self-Cutting in Female Adolescents. Psychotherapy, Vol 32, No. 1. (162-171).
Zila, L. M. & Kiselica, M. S. 2001. Understanding and Counseling Self-Mutilation in Female Adolescents and Young Adults. Journal of Counseling & Development. Vol 79. (46-50).



Linda Stupart Just Relax 1996
charcoal on paper, coloured pencil on photocopies

Throughout *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) Luce Irigaray suggests that when looking in the mirror, women merely replicate the male gaze as it is imposed onto their own bodies because they are denied selfhood within the patriarchal definition of woman. Berger too discusses the role of the mirror in reflecting the male gaze, which separates women from their subjectivity: "the real function of the mirror was [...] to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" (Berger 1972: 51). When Ashleigh looks in the flat shiny surfaces she is seeing herself separated from her own body, and outside of her own control. Unable to attack the phallogocentric powers that project this reflection, she lashes out at what appears to be their subject – herself.

As Greer asserts, "the woman who cuts her body asserts undeniably and emphatically that there is a self that has power over that body" (2000:104). While there are certainly more constructive means of expressing subjectivity (claiming agency without the sacrifice of pain), self-harm amongst adolescent girls is often a quest for empowerment while simultaneously attacking the body's exterior – the surface on which codes of gender, status and culture are inscribed. Self-mutilation should then be viewed in part as a reclamation of subjectivity that challenges women's roles as disempowered victims, even as they bleed.

The kind of self-harm largely attributed to teenage girls is also very different from the suicide attempt proper, where the subject is attempting to reach literal death. Rather, cutting (and minor burning etc.) can be read in the same way that Hopkins defines sadomasochism, through the concept of the "scene" (1994: 196), where performers within the SM subculture stage rather than inflict sexual abuse and severe violence (while suffering real pain). Most instances of adolescent self-harm are highly ritualised spectacles of the suicide scene, simulating both death and in girls the masochism imposed on themselves and their sexuality.

HORROR

If you're bored by it, pretend it's real, but if you're excited by it, pretend it's fake. – Bloodsucking Freaks (quoted in Newman 1988: 202 quoted in Pinedo 1997: 55)

Horror movies, in particular those of the slasher genre, are blatant simulations of violence, and in most cases, violence against women. Unlike actual sadomasochistic and self-mutilating practices, "horror relies on the realistic, but insistently simulated, representation of violence" (Pinedo 1997:62). The enjoyment gleaned from horror films rests, not unlike the experience of riding on a rollercoaster, on the simultaneous pleasures of fear and the appreciation of artifice – a pleasure made increasingly visible through the genre's increasing reliance on complex special effects. Horror fanzines delight in revealing the construction of the artifice in horror movies, and DVD releases of horror films are required to produce 'extras' detailing the methods of producing fear. The real horror fan, generally presumed to be male, is assumed to have a particular interest in

the special effects and props that create the gore (Brigid 2008: Online). Thus artifice is a defining factor in the enjoyment of the horror fantasy.

Despite their intentionally hardcore content, Midgley suggests that the "brutal fantasy" of horror "carries a core of sentimentality too" (1979: 385). She defends this hypothesis with the assertion that both the romantic and the horrific distort reality to allow the viewer to indulge either in their "softer-hearted" or more "tough" emotions. "The howling self-deception, the distortion of the world, is present in both cases" (Midgley 1979: 385). Thus, the impetus for watching a bad horror movie or romantic drama both reside in the need to deceive oneself from reality in similarly constructed, and similarly fake, escapist fantasies.

Horror functions as a safe space for audiences to enjoy death, terror and even their more harmful sadistic and misogynist fantasies. Horror, like sadomasochism, eroticises the victim/oppressor, sadist/masochist dualities within gender definitions. Unlike sadomasochism, however, the victims in slasher movies are never given the choice to evade their death, with stab scenes mimicking forced penetration until, paradoxically, a strong, smart girl will save the day. The fantasy of contemporary horror movies, particularly those of the slasher genre, is one that is intrinsically tied to masculinity and violence.

Slasher films, which tend to exist outside any kind of serious criticism (free as they are from tiresome regulations like plot, character development or intelligent dialogue) are nonetheless enormously popular and can be easily recognised by "the immensely generative story of a psycho-killer who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is himself killed by the one girl who survives" (Clover 1987: 187). Before his killing splurge begins, the psychopath needs to establish his distinctive role as predator towards his (mainly) female prey. Slasher films tend to open with a blonde, big-breasted, scantily clad young woman who is very often obviously flaunting her sexuality through her (lack of) clothing and blatant seductive posturing, or actively



Prom Night 2008
Directed by Nelson McCormick. USA: Sony Pictures
movie poster

engaged in some kind of elicit sex act (it is notable that the girl left to either defeat or be rescued from the killer is often defined by a kind of "sexual reluctance" (Clover 1987: 204)). Randy, one of the main protagonists in the Wes Craven (of *Nightmare on Elm Street* fame) slasher satire, *Scream*, lists the rules for staying alive in a horror movie. The first one is: "you can never have sex. Big no-no! Big no-no! Sex equals death, okay?" (1996).

Porn and horror are obsessed with the transgression of bodily boundaries. Both are concerned with the devouring orifice. But whereas pornography is concerned with the phallic penetration of sexually coded orifices like the mouth [...] vagina, anus, horror is more concerned with the creation of openings where there were none before (Pinedo 1997: 62).

In her study of women and the pleasures of horror film viewing, Pinedo refers to the "spectacle of the wet death" (1997: 51 – 68), a scene common in slasher films that, unlike the deaths in old-school thrillers, is intent on showing the inside of the body in an obsession that links horror and pornography, sex and death, eros and thanatos. That stereotypically beautiful women are almost always the victims of male killers certainly eroticises violence against women. The killer's choice of weapon, almost always a knife or other long, pointy object signifies not only penetration with a phallic signifier, but also a particularly intimate penetration where, unlike the gun, the knife is an extension of the male killer's body (Cover 1987: 198), culminating always in an ejaculation of fluids and a shuddering, moaning death. Of course, the heroine who wins in the end – very obviously and reluctantly appropriating the phallic weapons of the slasher to defeat him – counters this relationship of violent male dominance to some extent. Even in this case, however, although the woman eventually defeats misogyny, she must use male weapons to do so. Slasher movies then very obviously depict the gender roles established by patriarchy, within what is very blatantly a simulation, and not a replication, of violence. In an echoing of Susan Sontag's famous assertion, what horror is really about, ultimately, isn't death but sex.²²

²² Sontag's original text reads: "what pornography is really about, ultimately, isn't sex but death" (Sontag 1981: 80)

YOU DO IT TO YOURSELF (AND THAT'S WHAT REALLY HURTS)²³

CATHARSIS, PERSONA AND THE FIRST PERSON SEXUAL

"If pleasure is the commonplace explanation of the value of art, expression of emotion is the commonplace view of its nature" (Graham 1997: 50).

Graham, in a contemporary introduction to aesthetics, describes a view loosely termed aesthetic expressivism, as posited by philosophers such as Tolstoy, Croce and Collingwood from the late nineteenth century until as recently as the 1960s.²⁴ This view, that art is both an expression of the artist's emotion and that it need be expressive of an emotion to be successful, is one that remains particularly virile in the critical and public imagination, despite at least sixty years of a focus on the triumph of conceptualism.

With expressivism comes the notion of art-making as a cathartic exercise – a notion that is particularly useful both in terms of the process of some of my works, and in the engagement with and parody of this notion in others. Catharsis, the purging of emotions through art-making, links to notions of confession and autobiography and the establishment of an artistic persona. My autobiography relies largely on establishing what Naomi Wolf refers to as the "first person sexual" (1998: 1 – 15), claiming an empowered female voice in the discourse of experiences of sexuality.

CATHARSIS AND THE SUFFERING ARTIST

Expressivism is a view closely linked to nineteenth century Romanticism, a movement that sought to react against the overly ordered and intellectual focus of the Enlightenment. With its focus on sincere feeling, it saw the artist as a romantic hero in his/her own right – a separatist outsider position that fostered the myth of the Suffering Artist; the ideology that the tortured artist/hero, feeling more strongly than the average mortal being, uses art cathartically as an outpouring of emotion. The idea that art can be therapeutic for its makers arises from this notion of catharsis; that once the artist has spewed his/her pain onto a canvas or written it down, or sculpted his/her torment, s/he

²³ Radiohead. 1995. *Just. The Bends*. Parlophone, Capitol

²⁴ See:

Tolstoy, L. 1869 [1930]. *What is art?* trans. Aylmer Maude. London: Oxford University Press

Croce, B. 1922. *Aesthetic as science of expression and general linguistic* trans. Douglas Ainslie. London: Macmillan.

Collingwood R. G. 1938. *The Principles of Art*. London: Oxford University Press

is then purged of this emotion, suffering still (in a general, sexy, non-specific kind of way), but no longer afflicted by the particular suffering expressed in the canvas/text/sculpture.

My art-making process on many levels negates this possibility as it is largely removed from my own hand. Distancing myself from the idea of an artist as a special, practically gifted being, and denying myself the hands-on process of *creating* in the Romantic sense a process necessary for the release of real emotion (apparently.) That said, I do however find that some of my works are intrinsically engaged with the processes of catharsis pushing a memory of an event until the scale of the work surpasses the sadness of my memory²⁵, repetitively inscribing texts²⁶, or literally speaking the memories of past lovers to a policeman²⁷. Going through the motions of catharsis does not necessarily result in an actual purging of emotion, however. Although I may have gotten over the boy I spent a year making a sunset about, I hardly came out of a series of interviews about past lovers knowing I had suddenly purged myself of my feelings for them – if anything, the opposite holds true. Thus, though I engage in cathartic processes, going through the motions, the failure of this purging is important and often evident within my work. Within works that engage in these practices, is a sense of repetition, longing, loss and a failure to communicate emotion successfully. Other works function specifically as parodies of catharsis, melodramatically simulating its processes.

The ideal of the artist as a tragic genius who expresses their undeniably intense emotions through their work is at the root of the character of the 'suffering artist'; the solitary figure who feels his (and this notion is born of an idea of male genius) melancholy and hopelessness far more strongly for the fact that no mere citizen could ever fully understand his art. Commenting on a 2006 exhibition at The National Gallery in London entitled *Rebels & Martyrs: the Image of the artist in the Nineteenth Century*, co-curator Alexander Sturgis discusses how "the romantic myth of the genius suffering artist" that arose in the early 19th Century remains a prevailing theme two hundred years later, saying: "the unmade bed that bears the corpse of boy-poet Thomas Chatterton, a suicide at 17, in Henry Wallis' 19th-century portrait prefigures the messy-bed installation that made Brit art star Tracy Emin famous in the 1990s. The pale skin, dishevelled hair and staring eyes in self-portraits by Gustave Courbet and Alexandre Abel de Pujol are echoed in elegantly wasted rock stars, from Keith Richards to Pete Doherty" (Sturgis quoted in ArtInfo: Online). Thus, from Goethe's Werther and the original starving artist, Thomas Chatterton, to Van Gogh's self portraits, Rothko's muted palette and Emin's miserable bed, the myth of the suffering artist who uses their pain, oft cathartically, to create their art, is a prevalent one.

²⁵ See Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me (59-66.)

²⁶ See One Hundred Bullets With Your Name On Them (103 - 113.)

²⁷ See Wanted (79-102.)

PERSONA, AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE FIRST PERSON SEXUAL

Many contemporary artists function as much on their public, marketable personas as they do on their art production. This strategy, made (in)famous by Andy Warhol has, we are told, in many ways surpassed the work of art, i.e.: "the work of art is no longer necessary" (Young 2005: 73). Tracey Emin's drunken blue eyes stared out of a Gilbey's Gin advert and Damien Hirst was constantly in the tabloids for his drunken, boyish behaviour. In other cases persona becomes the work. Gilbert & George's lives are notoriously indistinguishable from their works; their day-to-day existence an endless, entwined performance.

The above examples all work within the system of the art world, the general public and the stereotypes of the artist (as drunk, lazy, spoilt etc.). However, before Tracey Emin was famous for being drunk on television, she was famous for the telling of her own life, her history, in the construction of a persona that is seemingly more emotional, painful and fragile than those of her sexy male counterparts. Emin established her persona through what is assumed to be an honest, moving and generous exposure of her life history (to be discussed further in the following chapter).

Not only did Emin make work about her life (before the narratives of her life surpassed the narratives of her life in her art), she made work about her life as a woman. She was controversial, difficult and successful because she was one of few women to claim a voice to tell of her own experiences; a privilege denied in the Freudian, romantic and sexual modes discussed thus far. She was confessional, or "all voice" (Smith 1999: Online), and arguably presented herself as a mad, drunk, emotional *Psycho Slut* (1999). Emin was (and continues to be) the "bad girl of British Art" (Longrigg 1997: Online).

"And, in the wake of the 'sexual revolution', the line between 'good' and 'bad' girls is always shifting, keeping us unsteady, as it is meant to do. It will not be safe for us to live comfortably in our clothes until we say: you can no longer separate us out one from another. We are all bad girls" (Wolf 1998: 5). In the introduction to Naomi Wolf's *Promiscuities: A Secret History of Female Desire*, the author defines the "'first person sexual', that most unladylike of voices" (1998:4). Wolf discusses her reasons for penning *Promiscuities*, a book about her and her girlfriends' sexual experiences and initiations while growing up during the sexual revolution, as partly "a desire to get closer to girls' emotional truth" and "partly out of stubbornness: if you are a girl this is something you are urged never to do. That voice turns you into a slut" (1998:4).

My reasons are largely similar. Although I do not necessarily presume my own sexual experiences to enlighten others about women's "emotional truths", the establishment of a voice, a sexual (and sometimes violent) voice is integral. Making art about sex, one would think, is completely passé. Robert Mapplethorpe took photographs of men fisting

each other, Jeff Koons made billboards of himself fucking his porn star wife, Andres Serrano photographed SM intimacy and a woman jerking off a horse. And long before them, both Manet and Picasso painted prostitutes (or a woman who appeared to be so in Manet's case). Nonetheless, when Emin presented a bed she has clearly had sex in, and a tent appliquéd with names of people she had slept with, she was quickly labelled a slut, a shocking impermissible figure. As a woman artist, the first person sexual is deplored – "a record of a female erotic past is almost by definition, according to the culture, a record of promiscuity dangerous to the memoirist" (Wolf 1998: 5). I, like Wolf, am inherently stubborn. "Writing from a position of marginality, women's life writing can be seen as a means of constituting new social subjects within the autobiographical tradition" (Betterton 2002: 29). Women are denied a voice within androcentric discussions of life experiences. A woman's emotional life, stories of her childhood, her loves, her pain and wants, is deemed inherently sentimental, and thus false and invalid. Her sexual history defines her as a slut, dangerous and dirty. Thus I choose to present both, violently claiming a voice through autobiography.

OH MAN SHE'S GOT ISSUES²⁸

WOMEN ARTISTS, CATHARSIS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

On her book *Strangeland*: I don't know much about nature and animals, but I do know about me and my life, so that's what I wrote about (Emin quoted in Beattie 2006: Online).

At the 2007 Venice Biennale, the French and British pavilions housed two female artists whose works both deal, albeit very differently, with the construction of self and the representation of personal suffering and survival, both notably from the same heteronormative position from which my own works are formed. Referred to by one author as "the two sirens of the Venetian Lagoon" (Spens 2007: Online), Sophie Calle and Tracey Emin seduce (though only Tracey plays the slut) with narratives sourced directly from their own biographies of sex, desire and betrayal.

Sophie Calle has become an icon of "a woman scorned",²⁹ with many writers in the popular and arts media discussing her Venice piece, *Prenez soin de vous* (*Take care of yourself*) as an eloquent exercise in vengeance (something the artist vehemently denies) [Calle in Chrisafis 2007: online]. The multipart installation deconstructs a breakup letter from Calle's boyfriend, which ended with the platitudinous farewell, "take care of yourself", and sees 102 women of different professions - from a clown and an etiquette coach, to the hardcore musician Peaches (of *Fuck the Pain Away* fame) - interpret her breakup letter, a process documented in emails, video, photographs and texts.

The work is about a breakup letter, a single breakup letter from a single man to Calle, but one that has been monumentalised to the position of *the* breakup letter - interpreted by over one hundred professional women and then again by the thousands who have seen the text or heard about the exhibition via external media, or bought the book that catalogues the work. One of the reasons this piece seems so resonant, both for art critics and the general public, is that it manages to transform the distinctly personal into the annals of shared experience, where Calle's pain becomes analogous to every woman (or man) who has ever received a breakup letter, or even who has been broken up with.

Douleur Exquise (*Exquisite Pain*) (1984 - 2004) also sees Calle memorialising a breakup. The work is a response to the artist being dumped by an older man over the phone while she was staying at a hotel in New Delhi. After travelling through Japan by train, the artist arrived at the lovers' arranged rendezvous point, only to be faced with

²⁸ From The Offspring, *She's Got Issues*. Americana, 1998. According to Wikipedia, this song "skewer[s] the 'victim complex'" (Wikipedia contributors 2008: Online). It details the problems of the narrator's girlfriend.

²⁹ See Chrisafis 2007: Online
Gopnik 2007: Online



Sophie Calle *Prenez soin de vous* (*Take care of yourself*) 2007 (detail) video installation

"the feckless paramour's failure to show up" (Princenthal 2005: Online) because he had met another woman (Calle was first told while boarding the plane to India that he had had to have been hospitalised in Paris). *Exquisite Pain* first details the artist's journey to the point where her doomed meeting is to take place; counting down in photographs and memorabilia the "days until unhappiness" (Calle 2004) and rewriting history as she now remembers it - as a countdown to tragedy.) On returning to Paris, the artist found that all she could talk about was her breakup. Realising this, she told 99 people her story in exchange for their own tragedies, and through the process of talking about her betrayal her own pain subsided, transformed many years later into an exhibition and book. "With this project, Calle invokes some deeply established beliefs. One is in the efficacy of catharsis as anaesthetic and prophylaxis to avert future disaster by using the past as a shield). Of course, such a process is never as reliable as we'd like; Calle approached the material in *Exquisite Pain* cautiously, letting it sit for nearly 20 years" (Princenthal 2005: Online). It took Calle over fifteen years to really 'get over' her relationship enough to transform this research into a book. Calle's re-telling of her breakup narrative in exchange for the painful stories of others, however, not only put her experience into perspective, but also allowed her to get "bored" (Ibid.) of talking about her experience - bored of her pain - until it got packed away into a box, witing to resurface.



Tracey Emin *My Bed* 1998
Mattress, linens, pillows, found objects
79 x 211 x 234 cm

By tending toward comedy, Calle also fights against the melodramatic clichés that art is still surrounded by -- clichés of the tortured artist, the lost romantic soul, the aesthetic spirit who feels more deeply than all others and often speaks in tongues. In [*Prenez soin de vous*], Calle is more torturer than tortured, more glib Don Rickles than babbling Ophelia. (Gopnik 2007: Online).

While the keeping, distributing and monumentalising of a breakup letter can be read as a distinctly romantic gesture, the subject of the work is not love, intimacy or sex, but its fissure, with Calle placing herself as a victim of the relationship. Unlike earlier work, *Prenez soin de vous* is particular in its use of mediation as a distancing and empowering technique, where the interpretations of other women, the everywoman, take the ownership of the text of the letter firmly out of the hands of its author. Calle too then is the victor, through a cynicism and humour that firmly sets her apart from the pure sentimentalist. She is victorious in taking ownership of her relationships and their termination. The artist claims agency as a woman in relationships (even when she has been dumped) in the unashamed voicing of *her* voice and *her* memories of these events. In the case of *Prenez soin de vous*, Calle adds to this expression the voices of a hoard of professional women (and a parrot), each dissecting her, and their breakup.

[Tracey Emin] says she'd give up drinking if she were to fall in love, and if she were in love then she'd be able to display more emotional control and reveal less in her writing and, presumably, in her art. Love is the answer to her problems, she seems to think, but she appears to feel unworthy of it, and relieved when the love affair is over, because when she is in love she thinks her partner will leave her anyway.

She is clearly lonely and idealises the love relationship to such an extent as to make it virtually untenable (Beattie 2006: Online).

Psychologist Geoffrey Beattie posits Emin as a pretty pathetic character, waiting longingly for a boyfriend to come and whisk her out of her lovelorn misery. In this text, Beattie denies Emin her agency, and appears to completely miss the point of her work, her life and her construction. The fact that Beattie's piece (originally printed in *The Observer*) is included on Emin's official website (<http://www.tracey-emin.co.uk>) says a lot about the artist's choices in how she constructs her own persona – as victim, slut, drunk, hopeless sentimentalist and tortured romantic. Of course, Emin is also a successful and completely competent artist; “she is an artist who has taken the commodification of the self to a new extreme” (Walker 2003: 248). Tracey Emin's work is generally presumed to be honest, confessional and completely autobiographical; however it would be naïve to think of her work as an unmediated “regurgitation” (Hayes 2004: Online) of her emotional life. Rather, although the artist convincingly invites viewers inside her personal life (literally in the case of *Everyone I've Ever Slept With* (1995)), she is completely in control of her out-of-control image. Emin's agency lies, like Calle's, in *her* telling of her life – even as it is a life of rape, abuse, abortion, depression and alcoholism (largely through the fault of men). “Truth is such a transient thing... it's like with my work, people say, “Oh, the honesty and the truth behind it” - but it's all edited, it's all calculated, it's all decided. I decide to show this or that part of the truth, which isn't necessarily the whole story, it's just what I decide to give you” (Emin in Barber 2001: Online).

The truths that Emin chooses to tell are ones that fall decidedly into that “most unladylike of voices” (Wolf 1998:4). Emin speaks, writes and makes work about sex, depression and relationships in a decidedly female and fragmented voice. *My Bed* (1998) is Emin's pivotal piece, where Emin exhibited her unmade, soiled bed. “For her London critics, *My Bed* exemplified and expressed Emin's sluttish personality” (Cherry: Online). However, much of the tragedy of the installation was overlooked in the reception of the work as dirty, damaged and sexual. Certainly, used condoms, empty vodka bottles and bloodstained panties suggest a period of excess on the artist's part – a decadent foray into drunken sex. However, all of the same markers, combined with the noose that hung, ominously, from above *My Bed*, confess a hopelessness amongst the debris. As opposed to merely being the hardcore woman exposing her sexuality to the world (which she remains), Emin tells us of the difficulties of her position as a woman within sexual and domestic discourses. *My Bed* documents a difficult, unhappy time in the artist's life, representing an adolescent struggle for subjectivity within the mess of her everyday experience as a woman, and as herself.

A similar practice (and misreading) happens with Emin's *Everyone I've Ever Slept With 1963 – 1995* (1995), a tent with names embroidered on the inside of it, which can only be viewed in its entirety if the viewer stoops down, childlike, and enters Emin's construction. Misread (almost surely as it was intended to be) as a list of Emin's sexual conquests, *Everyone I've Ever Slept With* is rather a catalogue of actual sleeping partners. While it lists those she has had sex with (like the infamous Stuckist, Billy Childish), the tent also includes the name of her twin brother who she shared a bed with as a child. Thus, the work functions on multiple levels, and is a non-linear, complex autobiography of intimacy. Emin names her lovers, as well as those she has loved enough to sleep next to, in a work that deliberately prods at the stereotypes of women who have slept with multiple partners, while still working within the language of sentimentality and the women's crafts associated with it. While Emin may be constituted as the ultimate victim (miserable, drunk, used by men all of her life), she establishes agency through the telling of her stories of victimhood, thus negating the passivity the notion of the female victim implies. Like Calle, "Emin retains the ownership of her own stories. She reworks and



Ruth Sacks Couch Thrown 2005
couch and bronze plaque

represents them in ways that assert her agency as an artist" (Betterton date: 33) and as a woman - an empowered subject within art, emotional and sexual discourses.

Writing about Capetonian Ruth Sacks' first solo exhibition, *When the Inside Stays Inside*, I described the show as "an elucidation of the difficulty incurred in finding a grand expression for a personal narrative; where sometimes, as Sacks says in her press release for the show, 'when things go wrong, it's hard to get the right words out'" (2005: Online).³⁰ Though thoroughly engaged with the mechanics of the art world(s), Sacks'

30 I am aware that quoting myself and slipping into anecdotal descriptions of Sacks' work



Ruth Sacks Please Don't 2004 (detail)
engraved wooden stools

work is often distinctly personal, in some cases working within decidedly cathartic performances (although the artist prefers not to push this point) (Sacks 2007:101). In 2005, I found myself accompanying Sacks for a drive over Chapman's Peak. We noted security guards at the entrance to the road and places that were easy to climb down. We were looking for an appropriate cliff from which to throw a couch. "It was my mother's couch", was all that the artist told me about the work, and knowing of her mother's long battle with cancer and subsequent death, I felt it made complete sense. *Couch Thrown* (2005) involved Sacks throwing (well kicking with assistance) a couch off a cliff on the 7th of October 2005, with the artist placing a commemorative bronze plaque on the site of the performance a year later. Though Sack's remains characteristically reticent about the personal impetus behind her works, a clue comes in (what I presume to be a fake³¹) interview in her Masters of Fine Art thesis. Sacks describes here how her father, when moving out of the family home, was stuck with this couch which did not fit through the door of his new apartment (Sacks 2007: 101). Her response, to throw it off a cliff, is a parody of artistic catharsis, while still providing the artist with a way of guiltlessly getting rid of the offending object. The notion of ritualistic catharsis is further explicated in this work in terms of Judaism: "the couch piece occurred at the time of Tashlich, which is when one symbolically throws one's sins into a large mass of flowing water [...] This is to do with the Day of Atonement and cleansing oneself of sin. [...] I confused rituals by erecting a plaque a year later. This is the custom followed with gravestones for human beings" (Sacks 2007: 101 – 102). In *Please Don't* (2004), Sacks obsessively engraved a collection of stools she stole from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, repeatedly venting her pathetic plea every time (according to institutional legend) her boyfriend had done something to upset her. Although Sacks chooses to forcibly remove her work from her own emotional life (in catalogues, her thesis and press), she still uses cathartic processes to convert personal narrative into public memorial.

may seem trying; however, it is mostly through my personal engagement with the artist that I have access to the cathartic, emotive mechanisms of her work.

31 This presumption is due firstly to the fact that no one is listed as the interviewer, as well as to an understanding of the artist's working method within notions of real/fake, public/private etc.

WORKS

"I make art," Mike Kelley once said, "in order to give other people my problems" (Lewis 2005: Online).

Thus far I have established frameworks with which to better understand my own position as a woman artist. Disempowered through the Freudian model of psychoanalysis and fearful of the violence inherent in male sexuality, the body of work that follows claims an often-unheard voice of female sexuality. A voice that is uncompromisingly my own.

Working within the languages of nostalgia, sentimentality and romance, this work monumentalises, critiques and satirises these Hallmark© ideals, particularly as they fail in my own life experiences.

More than anything, though, the work in *I Love You to Death* is about my own life, a life of drama, sex, self-mutilation and excess. As such, rather than being conclusive, the works that follow struggle within the frames established thus far – potent narratives of my position as a woman artist.

University of Cape Town

MIX TAPE

Mixtape 2008 (detail)
approx 3 000 PostIts®
570 x 350cm

saw you in
some teenage
wet dream

Sun Go down
on me

you you you
you you

The love
the w

WE MUST
NEVER BE
APART

R A P E M E

I can make
your mouth
run dry.

This is
harder

kiss me
please kiss
me

I am well
aware of
how it feels
but you still

All my
bringing you

It's a
bitters

Daniel Schacter, chairman of the psychology department at Harvard and the author of *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*, describes absent-mindedness as an encoding failure caused by distractedness, divided attention or the fact that your mind is filled with bulky and outdated information like the lyrics to "Muskrat Love." The Post-it, Schacter said [...], works as a "prospective memory cue or an external memory aid" that can compensate for that failure" (Green 2007: online).

It has long bothered me that my brain may be full of song lyrics. And by full I mean that its capacity has been reached because of these texts; that in remembering the lyrics to a Nirvana song that I haven't heard since the nineties there is no way I could also retain information about a host of useful things – countries' capitals, post structuralism, feeding my cat and so on. Song lyrics, as Schacter explains above, fall into the category of "bulky and outdated information" (Green 2007: online), not traditionally the sort of information useful or relevant to everyday practices. The Post-it®, however, is a marker of memory, and also of usefulness. A Post-it® reminds you of something important. Over 3 000 Post-its® force you to never forget. *Mix Tape* is a wall covered in neon pink Post-its®, with a fragment of song lyrics written on each.



- 1 THE UNICORNS: I was born (A Unicorn)
- 2 WOLF PARADE: We can sing
- 3 THE BAY LEAST LIKELY TO: Bo Gamy iddle Me
- 4 JENI LECKMAN: Two opposite of Hallelujah
- 5 Koolhaas: Lucki
- 6 HOT CHIP: Over and Over
- 7 NEW YOUNG PARTY CLUB: Je Calam
- 8 THE KILLS: At the back of the Shell
- 9 THE MACCAREES: About (Lucky Drea)
- 10 GANG OF FOUR: We are Love as we Dreamt
- 11 HOT HOT HEAT: No, Not Now
- 12 THE SUBWAYS: Rock n Roll Queen
- 13 THE RACONTEURS: Steadily as she Goes
- 14 KING OF LYON: Milk
- 15 THE BANG: Shung
- 16 SUNSET RUMDOWN: No Ones in Between
- 17 F. - : # Summer Dress (all for Winter Cloths)
- 18 LA TENGO - Sugarcube
- 19 THE ARCADE FIRE: Vampire Forest fire
- 20 SAY HI TO YOUR MOM: Angels and Darkies
- 21 THE THRILLS: Not for all the Love in the world

The cover of a Mix Cd, entitled I'll Start Believing in You if You Start Believing in Me given to me by a boy in 2008

Music and nostalgia have been linked since the terms' first usage. In the 1800s, when Swiss mercenaries in Europe were among the first victims of what Susan Stewart now refers to as the "social disease" (Stewart 1993: IX) of nostalgia, "Swiss soldiers were forbidden to play, sing, or even whistle alpine tunes" (Lowenthal 1985:10). Music is then intrinsically linked to nostalgia, a particular song often bringing unwanted and powerful memories of a time, place or person that are far more vivid and emotional than any physical remnants (photographs and the like) or memories. It is thus often through the language of musicians, bands and songwriters that we negotiate our lives and remember our pasts.

The personal mix tape³² is particularly nostalgic and sentimental, both in the mix and the tape. The very medium of the cassette tape is imbued with the retro-cool embedded in recently outdated technology. Obsolete analogue technology holds a particular place within the annals of popular nostalgia, and the mix tape (or now the cd) is very often associated with a mix made for someone else, usually a new lover. Often, it is the last thing to be burnt or the last thing left of a relationship. The tradition of hand-drawn covers and the pains we go through when choosing songs, lyrics and what emotions to convey are all rife with longing, desire and sentimentality. In many ways, the mix tape is the ultimate romantic gift, in that it acts as a conduit for your own emotions and confusions (written and sung by people more talented than yourself) and wraps them as a gift for your lover.

No bullshit, but I never leave the house without a mix for anything: Falling in love. Witnessing a death. Disappointment. Impatience. Traffic. I carry a mix for any human condition. Anything really good or bad happens to me, and my way to not overreact-like, to distance my emotions... is to locate the exact perfect sound track for that moment. Even the night Rant died, my automatic first thought was: Philip Glass's Violin (Palahniuk 2007: 41).



The cover of a Mix Cd, entitled A Cheesy Kind of Love given to me by a boy in 2008

A Cheesy Kind of Love:

1. New Age Girl - Dead Eye Dick
2. Light Up the Sky - Yellowcard
3. Barking Heart Baby - Head Clubmatics
4. Qline with the Glory of Love - Say Anything
5. Never be Lonely - The Feeling
6. Into the Dark - Juliana Theory
7. Everything - Lifehouse
8. All Great Me - Flyleaf
9. Dust - Kingdom
10. Valentine's Day - Green Day
11. Gummy - Hedley
12. It's Not Over - Daughtry
13. Dinosaur - Decapitated
14. Rehab - Rihanna
15. Almost Lover - A Fine Frenzy
16. What Else Is There - Rhye
17. Virgin Shake a Mind - K's Choice
18. I'm Still Breathing - Kelly Rowland
19. My Sincere - Jimmy Eat World

These words are transcribed as and when I hear them, and are thus a chronicle of my music, much of which is nostalgic, whimsical, violent and romantic. Thus the piece functions as an introduction to my body of work (much of which is titled after song lyrics) by positing popular culture translated through my own tastes and experiences, and seducing the viewer with texts they may often recognise, re-contextualised as my own personal mixtape.

In transcribing these lyrics I noticed that almost every single text referred either to another (she, he, you) and/or the self (I/me). From the most banal request, like "please,

³² The tradition of the mix tape involves one person creating a compilation of music for someone else, or even for himself or herself. This has largely, though not entirely, been replaced by mix CDs.

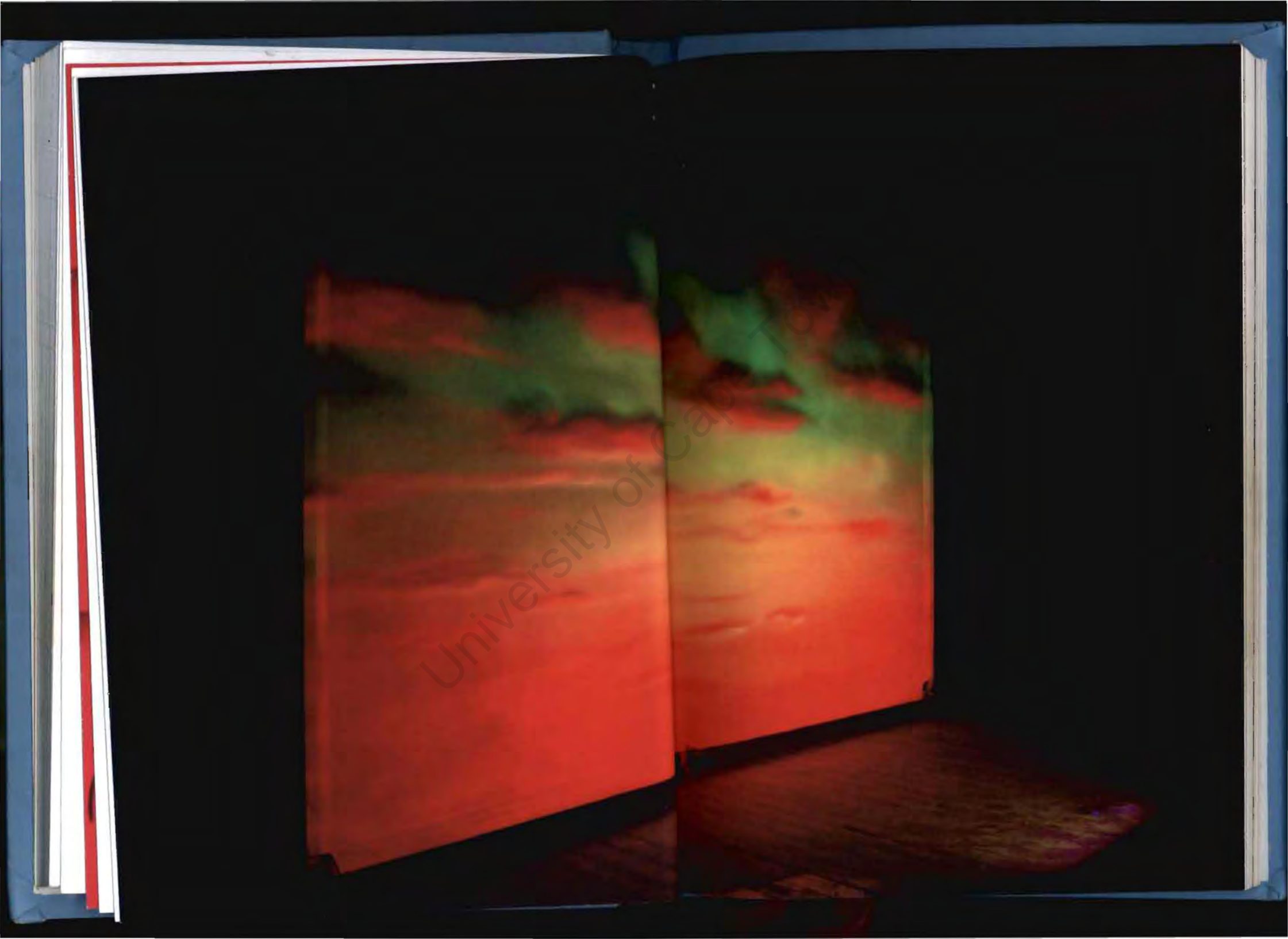
come take my hand³³” to the distressing plea, “rape me”³⁴, the majority of the texts in *Mix Tape* present a conversation between, or about, lovers of sorts. This pink passage of emotion graces an entrance into the body of work - a mediated self-portrait and grand romantic gesture for everyone and no one in particular.

33 Neil Diamond, 1967. Girl You'll Be A Woman Soon.
34 Kurt Cobain, 1993. Rape Me.

DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON ME¹

Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me
2008
fluorescent paint on canvas, UV light
300 x 500cm
Photograph: Carl Morrow.

¹ Elton John, 1974. Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me. Caribou. MCA.



(Kind of) sad news

Inbox | x

Ashley Kanter to me

View details 9/7/06 Reply

Hey

K, well, I met some one (kind of), and it seems like it's going somewhere. It had to happen eventually but I'm surprised that it happened so soon. Nothing might come of it, but I still thought it was important that I told you.

Anyway, I also wanted you to know that you'll always be special to me, and you're possibly one of the most inspiring people I've met. Ironic that I bring out the compliments now I guess. If you were still coming to Joburg I still would have been really keen to see you, and I hope we'll be seeing plenty more of each other in the future.

Sorry if I'm being overly (or underly) sensitive about the whole thing, regardless, things were great, and I hope they can still be great, just in a different way.

Take care of yourself. I'll be in touch

Much love
Ash

[Reply](#) [Forward](#)

On September the 6th 2006 at 6:49pm, I received an email with the subject (*Kind of*) *sad news*, which was sent to tell me that the boy with whom I had had a fling while in Johannesburg had met someone else. As a matter of interest, it fascinated me (in retrospect) that the letter ended in the same way as Sophie Calle's now famous breakup text, signing off with *Take care of yourself* [sic] (at least Calle's ex-boyfriend could spell). Thinking about markers of our affair, I remembered marveling at Johannesburg's sunsets, even as I realised that they were caused by the filth in the air, which is so indicative of the city. As I had stayed in contact with Joburg Boy, I asked him to send me photographs of sunsets, looking for particularly lurid skies. I thus began reconstructing a sunset in bright colours with sleazy neon edges, and on February the 9th 2007 at 7pm I opened *Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me* at blank projects space, and on its completion I realised that, like for Calle, "the project had replaced the man" (quoted in Chrisafis 2007: online).

The exhibition venue was chosen largely so that the piece could be viewed from the outside as a contained sunset; a consumable souvenir of one particular love affair in the smog-engulfed streets of Johannesburg. As it happened, however, there was exceptionally unseasonable rain the entire evening, so the attendees tended to huddle inside the gallery space, the sickly glow reflecting off their faces. Those that did venture outside for a cigarette stood miserable and drunk in the rain, sipping their brightly coloured cocktails adorned with miniature, pathetically ineffectual umbrellas.

Though the specific story of this love affair was never meant to be told didactically through my sunset, the work's title explicitly references ideas of being discarded by a lover, taking its wording from the title of a well known and oft-kareoked Elton John ballad, whose lyrics include:

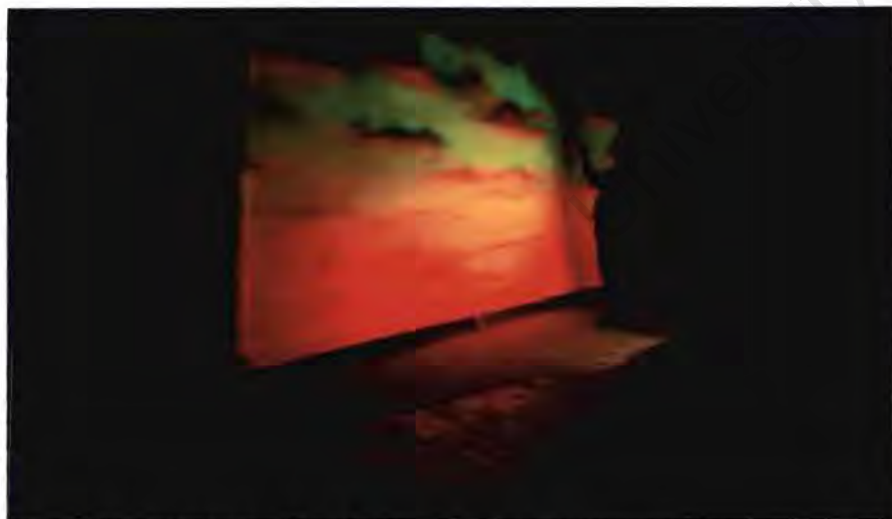
I can't find
Oh, the right romantic line
But see me once and see the way I feel
Don't discard me baby don't
Just because you think I mean you harm
Just because you think I mean you harm, oh
But these cuts I have, cuts I have
They need love
They need love, they need love to help them heal

Oh, don't let the sun go down on me
Although I search myself, it's always someone else I see
I'd just allow a fragment of your life to wander free

"Cause losing everything is like the sun going down on me" (*Caribou* 1974)

The piece references a romantic liaison. Its termination is a plea asking, impossibly, for the sun to never go down. Besides this romantic gesture, kitsch is the general motif here. Excess transformed the image of a pretty sunset into something obscene, the cheap cocktails adding to the glut of sleaze and over-consumption. More than a sentimentalised image, the engulfing kitsch of the mural turned the gallery into an uncomfortable, un-pretty space; an instance of what Jameson refers to as the postmodern "camp or "hysterical" sublime" (Jameson 1991:34). The fakeness of this environ is potently apparent and functions largely to negate any ideas of 'real' feeling that may have once belonged to the event it references, or to the actual sunsets so violently reproduced on greeting cards around the world, making evident an example of the Dysneyesque nature of the hyperreal. Through harsh lighting, drunkenness and luminescent colours; excess, sex, love and the violence of romance become explicit in this memorial to a holiday affair.

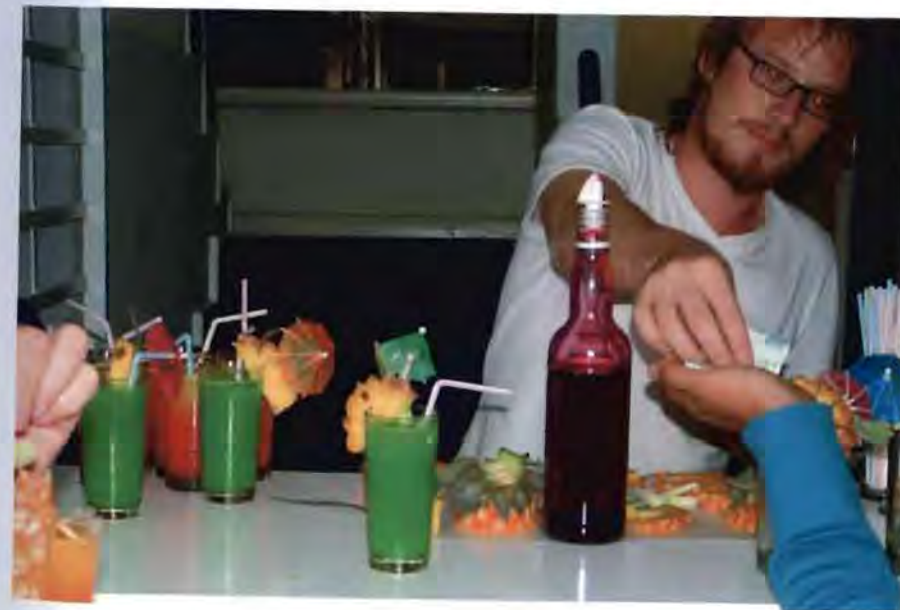
In reworking the piece for another gallery moment, I hired a professional set painter (who specialises in skies) to airbrush a giant (3 x 5m) sunset backdrop – engaging specifically in the language of cinematic excess and fakery. I discarded the neon of Vegas in exchange for the fluorescence of rave culture. Fluorescent paint is seen in cheap clubs and outdoor trance parties the world over, and is strongly linked to a very particular kitsch aesthetic (hand painted spirals, pixies, rainbows and the like) intended to stimulate revellers high on hallucinogenics and amphetamines. As such, *Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me* pleads for an eternal rush and everlasting love affair. Asking, please, to never come down.



Set painter, John Trafford, airbrushing fluorescent paint in the dark



Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me 2007
opening at blank projects space



University of Cape Town

EVERYTHING WILL BE
ALRIGHT¹ (HE COMES BACK
TO LIFE IN THE END)

Everything Will Be Alright 2007/2008
video
00:15:30

1

Flowers, B, 2004. Everything Will Be Alright. The Killers. Hot Fuss.



Everything Will Be Alright (He Comes Back to Life in the End) uses found footage from the 1984 classic children's film, *The Neverending Story*, and shows a pivotal scene in the movie where the film's main protagonist, a young boy named Atreyu, must watch his horse and best friend, Artax, drown in the Swamps of Sadness. On a short and eternal loop - Artax sinks, Atreyu cries and eventually (after the video has run for ten minutes) screams. The video suggests a very personal and tragic viewing, where I have taken a segment of my own (and a very collective) childhood disillusionment, and played it over and over again, telling myself each time that eventually everything really will be alright.

The act of nominating a scene from *The Neverending Story* as an artwork, and as a culturally significant text, is a betrayal of my own character as highly sentimental and inherently nostalgic. In particular, this closed circuit of a terribly sad moment from an 80s children's film is unable to escape the "romantic pessimism [that] characterizes the mood of nostalgia" (Dudden 1961: 517), where I really can't ever go back (despite the title's optimistic promise).

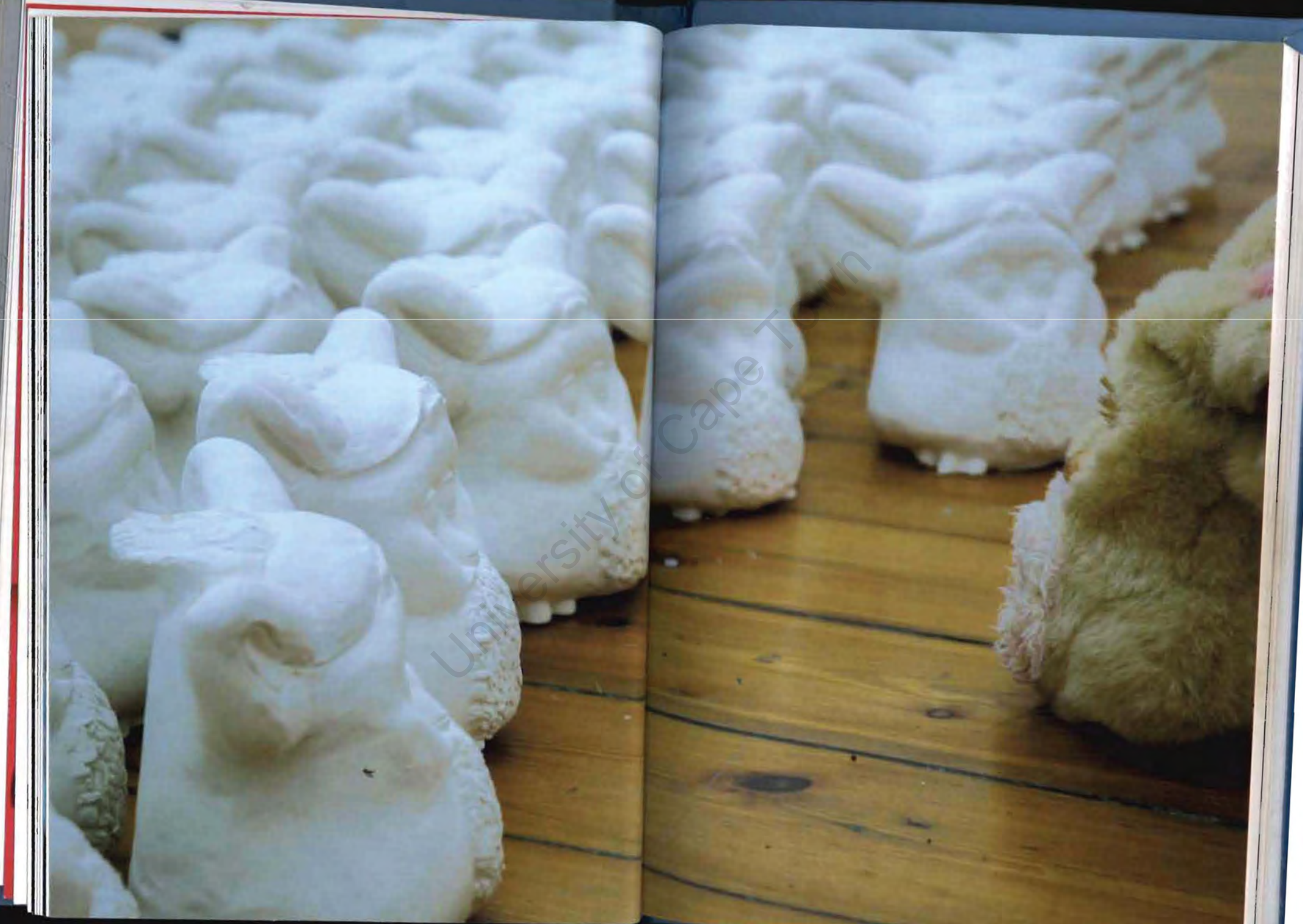
As we watch *Everything Will Be Alright* we are made excruciatingly aware of the unreality of the narrative, presented here as a floating signifier outside of its original story (where the horse does in fact return to life). In watching Atreyu watch Artax sinking, the distance of the copy is painfully rendered, even as we are still affected by its blatant manipulation of our emotions.

Everything Will Be Alright is a memorial of sorts, mourning the loss of childhood expectations. Imbued with the disease of nostalgia, but also rife with decadent close-ups of a beautiful young boy with big eyes; a thrashing, sighing, dying horse (that ever present symbol of virility); and a big death that will happen over and over again (its negation hinted at in the title but never seen in the piece itself); this scene is an orgy of pain and longing.

ONE MORE ROBOT¹

One More Robot (detail) 2007 – 2008
Furby © and one hundred white stoneware sculptures
dimensions variable

¹ Flamin Lips. 2002. One More Robot- Sympathy 3000-21. Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots. Warner Brothers Records. (See Addendum A)



While there are a number of apparent benefits that might be thought to accrue to the lonely or aged from the ownership of a robot pet, the majority and the most important of these are predicated on them mistaking, at a conscious or unconscious level, the robot for a real animal. For an individual to benefit significantly from ownership of a robot pet they must systematically delude themselves regarding the real nature of their relation with the animal. It requires sentimentality of a morally deplorable sort. Indulging in such sentimentality violates a (weak) duty that we have to ourselves to apprehend the world accurately. The design and manufacture of these robots is unethical in so far as it presupposes or encourages this delusion (Sparrow 2002:3).

In Phillip K Dick's seminal 1968 science fiction novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick poses a question that will become a staple both of science fiction and popular culture, particularly after the release of the 1982 cult classic loosely based on the book, *Bladerunner*. That is, if a machine seems able to think, can it feel? In Dick's book and in *Bladerunner* the main protagonist is faced with the job of killing or 'retiring' a set of androids (or 'replicants' as they are referred to in the movie) who are seemingly indistinguishable from human beings in both appearance and behaviour. The tool used for outing replicants³⁵ is the "Voight-Kampff empathy test", which measures facial reaction in response to emotional triggers, most of which involve descriptions of cruelty to animals (a rare commodity in Dick's dystopia). Replicants can fake these emotions (at times not even aware that their reactions are fake), their reaction time is considerably slower. Although the texts follow the protagonist through a field of moral minefields as he interacts with replicants on various levels, including befriending, killing and fucking them; the basic message here is that humans are separated from machines through empathy, or the ability to feel a real emotional connection to another living thing. Thus, the supposed affections of anything mechanical are immediately defined as false, a sentimentality that can be programmed into their systems.

He ascended ... to the covered pasture whereon his electric sheep "grazed" Where on it, sophisticated piece of hardware that it was, chomped away in simulated contentment, bamboozling the other tenants of the building.

Of course, some of their animals undoubtedly consisted of electronic circuitry fakes too (he had never nosed into the matter) [...] Nothing could be more impolite. To say "Is your sheep genuine" would be a breach of etiquette (Dick 1964:1).

In Dick's novel, the electric sheep in the title refers to the electronic pet of the main protagonist, who, unable to afford a real animal (priced according to their scarce availability) after his real sheep dies, replaces it with an electronic model that he 'feeds' daily to keep up appearances, and even sometimes sends to the fake veterinarian after it has a fake illness. This model of automated livestock bears an uncanny resemblance to a host of electronic toys available on the market today, from the original Tamagotchi©

craze of palm sized computer screen 'pets' to more advanced, and considerably cuter, Aibos©, Live Dolls© and Furbies©.

I discovered Furbies© while reading Brett Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park* (2005), where the main catalyst for the horror in this terrifying novel is an electronic children's toy, a 'Terby', who transforms into a live and lethal beast as the story progresses.

Terby was the bird doll I had bought Sarah in August for her birthday. It was a monstrous-looking but very popular toy that she's wanted badly yet the thing was so misconceived and grotesque – black and crimson feathers, bulging eyes, a sharp yellow beak with which it continuously gurgled [...] (Ellis 2005: 42).

On researching the source for this creature, I found a nineties classic re-released by Hasbro (the same company responsible for Transformers© and My Little Pony©) with vast improvements in its apparent cognitive ability, to the point where the toys were even banned from the Pentagon for fear that they were a threat to national security due to their learning capability (reference).

Most notable in these toys though, was their apparent capacity for emotion via what Hasbro refers to as "emoto-tronics".

With EMOTO-TRONICS, an entire gamut of emotions can be fully realized in a plush toy! EMOTO-TRONICS is the ultimate combination of advanced robotic technology, puppetry, and realistic lifelike form-factors. In other words, EMOTO-TRONICS makes the new FURBY toy the most lifelike, intelligent, fun, cute, and "realistic" creature Tiger Electronics has ever created! [...] A real FURBY creature has been born, and it's true essence is comprised of intelligence, expression, curiosity, joy ... and LOVE (Hasbro 2007).



Furby©

The Furby,© which New York Newsday referred to as an "imitation of life" (Hasbro 2007) on its release in 2003, is marketed with explicit reference to its emotional and interactive "life-like" capacity. In fact relatively technologically unimpressive and, certainly as my pet, largely unresponsive, Furby© is a poor copy of a poor copy of real affection and friendship. As Dr. Robert Sparrow claims in his essay, *The March of the Robot Dogs*: "no matter how sophisticated [robot pets] get, they will remain simulacra for the foreseeable future. While robot

³⁵ I prefer to use this term here, although it is not used in the original text, as it is useful in terms of notions of the real vs the copy and notions of authenticity discussed earlier in this text.

New Furby Hacking : Part 1 : Skinning

Yesterday I went and bought the New Furby which just came out in October this year. The new Furby is a pretty darn advanced toy for only \$30, if you haven't seen one before they are basically armless Mogwais with beaks. New Furbys are powered by the Sensory Inc's RSC-4128 which is a multi-purpose microprocessor that does everything from voice recognition to text-to-speech to IO to DTMF output. After reading through the white paper for the RSC-4128 I was pretty sure that the Furby would be quite the hackable robot, so I decided to take a look inside and see what hacking would entail.



758

digg it

WARNING : If you take apart Furby it will never be the same once you put it back together, unless you are really good with a sewing needle.

I started by removing the feet which are fastened to Furby with a triangular security screw. The Boxer 62 piece security bit set that I bought at Fry's a few years back contained a triangular bit that was just slightly too large to fit the Furby foot screws, so I filed it down a tad and it went. After taking off the feet, the clawed under-feet were exposed which were surrounded with little fur booties that just slid off with a little tug. Once I removed the under-feet I could see how the fur was attached to the skeleton.

The fur is glued on in 2 places, which I cut with a sharp knife. The fur also has plastic tabs that go into the base of Furby, which can be pulled out with a little effort. Once you have the base of the fur free from Furby you will have to open up the back of his little fur suit, this back is lightly sewn with just a few stitches and opens easily once you free the first stitch, almost like it was made to come open easily.

After you have opened the back of the suit you can slide it over his head, you will have to snip the small threads at the tips of his ears to get it off over his head, don't snip the big white threads that loop through the plastic ear guides, this is used to track the location of the ears.

You will also have to snip the thread on the tip of his mohawk support and the thread wrapped around his eyebrow mover.



Dave Bullock's online guide to hacking Furbies©

animals may be designed to behave in ways which closely mimic the behaviour of real animals, their behaviour remains just this imitation. In particular, robots do not feel or experience anything (2002: 16).

In *One More Robot* my Furby© stands facing an army of sculpted Furbies, or Furby© replicants, made out of white clay. These simplified, less cuddly, more robotic looking Furbies are even further removed from any kind of authentic emotional being because they are sculptures. In the Platonic model merely mimeses, impersonating the real, moved by their nature as art away from truth. (Plato 1955 [1578]: 421-426) These sculptures thus become a further copy of the Furby,© and one with which neither the Furby© nor a person can interact, staring at their master who bears a resemblance to no real animal, but only to itself.

The real Furby© addresses his cohorts with the first phrase that Furbies© are programmed to say, the only phrases available in 'shop mode' (used to test Furbies© facial responses) - "you, me friends?" and "you, happy, see me?" His question eternally unanswered, his giant robotic eyes blink and cast themselves downwards, his beak curls in a frown and his ears lower in a sigh. Over and over and over again.

While the primary response to this piece has more to do with sentimentality than horror (even though I discovered the beasts in a horror novel), the refusal of Furby's© army to be his friend, their lack of response and their existence en masse all refer to the horrific, particularly in relation to popular film and literature, referencing both the 'robot killing machine' and 'toy come to life to kill everyone' fantasies prevalent within the genre.

Japanese roboticist, Dr. Masahiro Mori, established what he referred to as the "Uncanny Valley", where he explains that robots become disturbing to us when they become *too* human, that if an entity is sufficiently non-human like, the human-like characteristics will stand out and a human will empathise with them. However, if the entity seems almost human in appearance and motion, then the non-human characteristics will stand out to humans and consequently disturb them (Mori 1970: 34). The Furby© does not attempt to be human, but its movements attempt an organic reality that falls just short of the dip into Mori's valley, or certainly did when they were first created. In *One More Robot* there is a collection of inanimate objects, none of which appear as though they should speak, yet their leader does and the gap as he waits for a response from his robot friends suggests that, somehow, they could too. It was when someone accidentally woke my Furby up by whistling in my studio that the horror of the animate/inanimate was made truly visible in my friend's real fear. For me, the Furby itself exists in the liminal space of the animate/inanimate, and with an army to command presents the "[coexistent] phobia and fantasy of toys coming life" (Pujals 2007: 3).

If kitsch and sentimentality deal with "inappropriate objects, objects that do not warrant the emotion in question" (Solomon 1991:11), then surely the average (and the intended) reaction to the piece - aaah, that's so sad, poor Furby© etc. - is deeply

sentimental. In this way, the piece uses the manipulative nature of the producer of the sentimental or kitsch to elicit an initial response. Said response, however, and the mechanics used to elicit sentiment in response to the Furby© are questioned in the horror of the Furby army, and the incapability of the Furby© replicants to register a response is mirrored in the real Furby's constructed, fake emotional charge.

WANTED

Wanted 2007 – 2008
20 A3 archival prints on cotton paper
Edition of ten



Male, Oh and Caucasian.

He is South African although his family is French or something

Sixteen, definitely, exactly. Yes. I'm sure

I think he was quite tall. No um I dunno, a bit taller than me. No maybe more um he is about this high. God I don't know. Ok. Yeah I guess. 5ft 10" about.

Skinny. Very skinny. Ha. Um he looks a bit like Macaulay Culkin actually if that helps. But yeah, pale and skinny. Um no he had a slight belly. Undefined I suppose is a good word.

Uh no, piercings? Oh OK.

Blue pale pale blue you would notice them. Never seen eyes like that before. Fuck, it's hard to explain. Yes yes. Um (sniffs)

Hmm I think um it was kind of thin. No no um maybe narrow and then rounded at the bottom, also like Macaulay Culkin. Home Alone? Anything. Well I don't know. It was a long time ago. Fuck.

Hmmm Pink. Very pink. Uh and big. Well round. Uh, like a child or a cherub or I dunno. He is constantly biting his bottom lip. Yeah. Yes. (sighs)

Um kind of rounded. Non defined I think.

God I don't know.

No no totally smooth, hairless. Haha yeah (sniffs)

He is very pale... fuck... almost translucent. We thought he was dying the first time we saw him. Like a cancer patient, very pale. Pale. (sighs) Sickly.

English and French. He can speak French, ha.

No none. Nothing I think. He sounds a bit British almost, but otherwise just English.

A silver ring. He always wore it on his left hand. No I don't know. I don't know. Eah on his ring finger. No I don't know. Oh and he has an eyebrow ring. Or maybe he got that later. Oh nevermind. No a blue eyebrow ring on his um... uh right his right eye. Fuck no left. Uh left. Yes.



White male yes. (sighs)

As far as I know he was South Africa is. I dunno

Sixteen? No, wait, um, older. Around eighteen, nineteen maybe. Yeah

Um I dunno. Tallish maybe. Um, Had to say, like a head taller than me maybe. Yeah, medium

Skinny. Definitely skinny. Like gross rib showing skinny

Um, no tattoos. No scars that I remember

He had raver hair. Um. Like short and spiky. Gelled. Dark brown almost black I guess

Brown eyes. Um, biggish rounded yeah. Ugh

His nose was narrow I mean straight maybe I think. Yeah, like that probably

Thin lips. Mean lips. He had a tendency to sneer, if that helps

Um narrow pointy chin. I think

He had fangs. Pointy back teeth. And his top front teeth were skew

A bit of stubble. I think. maybe. No actually none

Pale. Sickly, drug addict pale

English.

Well with a slight Afrikaans accent actually. Um I think

No none that I remember. But probably, he seems like the type. Oh well he has a cock ring. Ugh. A luminous orange cock ring. Prince Albert. Yes. No I guess not



Male, white. Yeah I know.

Um South African as far as I know

Nineteen no, fuck he was older than me. Um twenty-three. Or two I think. Around there

Um fuck (sighs) I think not very tall. Hmm uh just a bit taller than me I think. Probably I guess around 5ft 10" maybe?

Skinny as well. Um but pretty skinny. Not emaciated. Arm muscles. Um little maybe? No or defined. Um lean. Yes. Ok sorry.

Um he has a shooting star tattoo on his uh left? Arm. Like the one on the cover of The Little Prince. Big. On his bicep. (sighs) yes. I don't know

Fuck. I think he had longish hair. Like over his eyes on one side. A side parting? Maybe. Slight curl I think. Floppy, very floppy. Oh brown yes. All brown

Um big big brown eyes. Sad eyes. Ah fuck, sorry (sighs)

God I don't know. Noses never really feature for me so much. Ah narrowish I guess. Straight. Kind of. Yeah I dunno. No, um maybe rounder at the bottom. Cute-like. Uh yeah I guess

Um a fullish bottom lip. Uh ja. Whew. Um but thin top like. Kinda. Oh god I just don't know. (sighs) sorry. No it's fine. Carry on.

Narrow chin. Not pointy. Jus the kind of chin a young skinny person has I guess. I don't know really I don't. um. . yes yes. I suppose

Teeth like I guess. Um no I'm sorry I just don't remember

No I don't think anything. No.

Pale. Not gross pale. Just pale. White. Um yeah

None to speak of. Haha. No.

Zombies. You know those things. Um plastic, black you wear on your wrist. And fuck that leather bracelet. Oh wow. Um leather thin piece of red leather around his arm. Fuck when did I lose that? Oh nevermind...



Yes yes, haha no surprise White Male Yes

South African, although yes I guess so

Um nineteen Yes I know. (sighs)

Tallish About there. Yes. Pretty tall I guess. Maybe 6ft 6ft 2"?

Thin. Um yes yes skinny. Surprise. Boysh Yes.

Um no. Oh wait, an appendix scar. And... no that's all. On the left. On his hip bone. Yes. On the (sighs)

Brown. Yes. I know. Um dark brown. Curly. Coming forward onto his forehead on the... um right side. Yes.

Brown eyes. Puppy eyes. Brown...uh...yes.

Oh oh yes his nose... he had quite a big nose. A proper nose. Yes. um rounded. French-looking yes! (sighs) I don't know

Thick lips. Pretty. Kind of...no...wait...um...a thicker bottom lip. Pretty. Pouty. Yeah kinda gelly. No thinner actually. Oh I don't know. Yes

He has a square chin. Narrow. Yes, yes. And high cheekbones and a very straight jaw. And square but narrow. Yes... yes! (sighs) yeah.

Fangs. He definitely has fangs. Long canines. Yes.

Um a little bit of stubble sometime. No beard to speak of. More just like a shadow I guess. No not really

Pale. He never went in the sun. I know.

English.

He sounded very British though... um... an almost British accent.

No no not the type no. Oh but glasses, yes glasses. Yes yes. Um square. Like that. Nerdy glasses, but like trendy nerdy. Yes. That's that's (sighs) him.



Ok phew. Uh white male, yes

South African I guess

Uh fuck I actually don't know, maybe like twenty-four I guess. Or a bit older maybe

He is about medium height, maybe a bit taller. Yes, probably about 6ft

He is pretty skinny as well. But with a slight tummy. Yeah

Um he has a Swoon tattoo on his left forearm. No I guess that doesn't help. Ok fuck (shifts) phew
ok he has a tattoo of this woman's face, with very dramatic lighting on the one side. Black. And above
it it says "Eternity" in capital letters. Written quite shakily. Hm. Also an appendix scar. I think

Uh he has very short black hair

Dark eyes. Dark brown. Big, sad. Hm

Ok he has one of those kind of piggish noses, like turns up at the end kind of. ja. small. button-like.
Yup

He has kinda thin wide lips, huh. I think. Fuck (sighs)

Ok he has a pretty undefined chin and jawline, like rounded, and then there is a tiny puffy thing
like towards the left. Very slight. I think well. Ok ja

Uh I really couldn't say

He has a kind of accidental pencil moustache. Slight but sort of always there. Yeah

Kind of tanned-ish. Huh

English

Uh no no accent, unless maybe a big British. Kind of

No no none...



White, Caucasian. Yes, I suppose we can.

Well, hmmm. Huh. He is, wait, um Greek mostly? He looks Greek. He grew up in Zimbabwe though actually. Ok no? Right.

Um fuck. Uh. I think he's what about. Or he was um. about Twenty-four probably.

Tall. He's tall. I come up to about. um. here I think. So yeah pretty tall. Ok probably about 6ft 4". I guess if you say so.

Pretty big, I mean relatively anyway. Ok. well skinny legs but kind of. um. manly? Bigger arms. Uh. I guess sort of average sized. but one of those people who kind of seems big. you know? Um. ja. I guess.

No actually um none. I can think of. Huh.

Um he had a faux hawk. No ha ha sorry like a small Mohawk? Um like those. goes up in the middle to a semi-point. Geiled. Yeah. um oh pitch black. Totally black. And shiny (signs).

Uhm eyes, oh. (signs). fuck green. Very green. But dark. And big. Yes yes (signs). very big. And bushy eyebrows, but he plucked the middle. Haha. (signs).

Ok well. a big Greek nose? Does that help. Um. it's bent on the left. Well no it bends left. Around here. Sorry about the top of the nose, no well about a centimetre down. Ok um half way down the bridge of the nose. It's a noticeable bend and then the bottom of his nose bends to the right.

Big lips um. soft. haha sorry. Ok no. um big bottom lip. Pink. Yes. Yes.

Square jaw, yes. Very square.

Straight square white. Well I think.

No no none.

Olive-like. Ish.

English and Greek as well, oh and Shona as well.

Ha well that's tricky. uh. we always thought his accent was Transylvanian, but. I guess we made that up. uh ok so Greek I guess, but strong and intense.

No no none.



White male.

Uh American, actually

Hmm... I think about thirty-five? Somewhere around there

Not tall, maybe about 5ft8" I think?

Um... like medium? Not skinny skinny, and not built, ja medium I guess.

Hm. Well huh... ok so, he has a tattoo on his uh right arm that says "sickboy", but in gothic lettering. Big, it takes up his whole forearm. Yeah. Ok, um and then, on his... um... left calf he has a picture of... I think it's a woman, well I mean I think it has breasts, maybe, well anyway, a person with this giant erection. (sighs) Ok and then on his uh left arm I think he has a picture of this emo-looking guy riding a bicycle. Ok um like a drawing of Marilyn Manson would look? A bad drawing? A guy with straight hair and a stripey shirt. Ja, they're all black line tattoos.

Orange. He has proper ginger hair. And it's kinda short now well I think. Yup like that. Ha ha.

Um fuck, he has blue eyes, he must right? Fuck or are they light green? I can't believe this. Ok ok they're blue. Of course, light blue. Hm (sighs)

Jesus I really don't know. Nose-like. Ok Well yes. Um round at the bottom. No no real dents or anything. Yup yup.

He had quite thin lips. Delicate. Yeah. Hm

Like a rounded chin, but quite a strong jaw. Square

Yeah he had a beard and a moustache, also orange. Ginger. Uh not too thick. Kinda straggly, with a little sort of bokkie thing kinda. Yeah like that.

He was pale. Typical ginger complexion

He spoke English, well American. Ha ha.

He has this really Texan accent. Like very deep South. Well not very just this kind of Texan drawl. Hm

No no I don't think so. Maybe a digital watch. No but I'm not sure



White male

South African as well I guess

Uh nineteen. (sniffs)

Um I guess a bit under 6ft? Probably. Like medium height

Thin but defined. (sighs) like stomach and arm muscles and stuff. And calf muscles as well, but still pretty skinny. Uh hot. Yeah. I dunno. Fuck.

Uh fuck wait wait he definitely has a scar somewhere uh fuck his arm I think. Left arm?

Brown. dark brown. Uh longish and curly. pretty and he has an almost cowlick, like a permanent curl across the right side of his face. Yeah. Ha.

Amazing um blue green. Very light. Big. (sighs) uh very neat? But big light eyes. Yes.

Um a long thin nose. It has a very slight kink on the right side, just at the bottom of the bridge of his nose. Yeah. like that. Him.

Uh very gony. pretty. typical cupid's thingy in the middle and then thinish, thicker bottom lip. Yeah.

Um well defined cheekbones and then like a narrow chin, but rounded. like he has a soft face. yeah. yeah.

God I dunno. pretty normal I guess.

No. no none really that I remember. No.

Well he was a slightly tanned I guess.

English. English. yeah.

None I noticed ever. though a very very slight lip.

Um no. no none.



White male. Yes, thanks I know

South African.

Uh god about twenty-eight I think

I dunno, average-ish. Like under 6ft. Yeah, about 5ft 5"

Skinny, but like really skinny. Yeah, unhealthy skinny. But with a slight beer-boop. Ha

Oh yeah, ok, he has "Robert Sloan" tattooed on, I think it's his right shoulder? In a kind of fancy cursive script, well no... like a loose cursive like handwriting. Ja. And he has "Harm Lux" tattooed on his ass. Yup. Capital letters I think? Kind of rough handwritten

Uh it's kinda short. Short. Stands up a bit. Yup. Black, but with bits of grey now

Um ok, wait no... he has green-brown eyes. Dark, intense. Hm. And there are always rings and shadows under them. Yeah yeah

Quite thin lips. Ja pretty much, thin. Fuck I don't know

Quite a kind of rounded jawline, but still skinny. I don't know. Ok.

Standard I guess

Um he always has stubble. Well almost. He did. Everywhere

Pale, very pale.

Hm English and Afrikaans as well

He can sometimes have a very slight Afrikaans accent, but no really... he has quite a drawl though

Uh no. Oh yeah he was wearing a cap. He always wears a cap. Sometimes. Oh ja and a cock ring. (signs)



Ok well... white male

South African

He is uh twenty-three Yeah

Uh I guess he is pretty tall. Ja he is. Like 6ft 4" maybe?

Also skinny, but healthy skinny though

Uh he does definitely have an appendix scar. Left hip I think

He has long kind of bowl cut hair. Sort of. It parts to the side I think. To the right

Uh light blue eyes. (sighs) hm.

I dunno, a totally generic nose I think? Nothing special nose wise. ha

Uh he has quite girlish lips, like cupid's bow, but quite a thin top lip I think. Yeah

Uh he has a pretty rounded chin, but strong jaw line

Uh teeth-like. Yeah. Fuck who knows

He has a very slight moustache and kind of scraggly wannabe beard. Like for people who can't grow real beards and are too lazy to shave. Yeah mostly around the bottom of his chin

Pale. Pale

English

None to speak of I think?

Ok he has glasses. Also nerd-like glasses, but black, kinda thick? Yup. Ok

Devotion to the past [is] one of the more disastrous forms of unrequited love (Sontag 1977: 40).

Wanted presents a series of ten portraits of young men drawn by a police sketch artist with accompanying text pieces that document my half of the interview with the sketch artist as I described each subject. Stuttering, sighing and wistful pauses suggest, in some cases, that a long time has elapsed since I last encountered the individual's countenance. In other cases the memory is fresh and longing, but perhaps painful. In every instance, there is a suggestion of intimacy between the accused and myself, even as I may struggle to remember what, exactly, they look like.

As with Emin's tent, this work documents *Everyone I've ever slept with* (although I mean this in terms of intercourse³⁶), and thus finds a similar self indulgence and self fashioning in its establishment of my "first person sexual" (Wolf 1998:4). In its process, however, the piece also bears similarities to elements of Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain*, where the artist's pain subsided through talking repeatedly about her betrayal. *Wanted* is a call to look for a criminal from a victim but it is also a confessional, something that became increasingly clear as I visited the same police officer repeatedly - I did this (or them perhaps). *Wanted* makes this act of telling visible through text, giving my sexual history and my emotional response a voice as my definition of each perpetrator is concretised.

The repetition of certain words and sighs in the text, and even of various facial features in the sketches of the ten criminal/victims, is an important marker of the inability to find the actual person these images 'search' for. These bodies are clearly constructions of my own memory and imagination, and the search for the real, physical sexual body is presented as impossible in the series of images. Feeling increasingly like therapy sessions, the meetings that created this work enabled me to reconcile myself with these memories and create a work that, rather than placing myself only in the position of the victim, became a chronicle of survival, where "survival demands a bridging, a negotiation, an articulation of the moments "before" and "after" without necessarily assuming a historical or temporal continuity between them" (Bhaba 1995:20).

In constructing this hit list of faces on a wall, it becomes evident that the line between the transgressor and transgressed is blurred. Although I am suggesting myself as a kind of victim, and making my feelings clear in my wistful texts, the lining up of specific, sometimes recognisable conquests places these boys in a vulnerable position (as more than one of them related to me after seeing the piece). The *Wanted* poster also appears without a named crime, bearing resemblance to the format of the Missing Person identikit.

Wanted is explicitly about sex in that it records those who I have slept with, while the format of the wanted poster is also a clear indicator of violence. Why then the desire for

someone who (it is implied) has committed an act of violence against me? Is this a kind of Stockholm Syndrome? As with victims and kidnappers, Stockholm Syndrome "can also be found in family, romantic, and interpersonal relationships. The abuser may be a husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend, father or mother, or any other role in which the abuser is in a position of control or authority" (Carver 2001: online). While this question remains embedded in the work, more than being about sex or even violence, this piece is about desire - for the past, for a person, a relationship. It conveys the need to *find* someone, or in this case, perhaps something; a search that will always remain unresolved evident in the loss permeating the *Wanted* texts.

I HEART NEW WORK



Daniella Mooney I Heart New Work, 2008
intervention. Image courtesy the artist.

36 And, perhaps, not everyone.

Wanted was exhibited in 2008's *Come Again* at the Michealis Gallery on university premises. A number of people in the work (3 of ten) were instantly recognisable to the students and staff on campus. One of these was the infamous Cape Town conceptualist, Ed Young, who was lecturing in Performance Art at the time. For two years (2006 – 2008), Young's monthly ArtThrob diary was a hugely popular (although much derided) narrative on the Cape Town art scene. Although Young spoke of the works he was making, shows he was attending and curators he met, the diary was constantly filled with details of Young's sexual biography – girls (usually artists themselves) he had shagged, crazy ex-girlfriends who allegedly harassed him and 'lots of "boobies"'.³⁷ With a dearth of platforms for this kind of expression in the South African art world and few, if any, South African women artists making work about their sexual experiences, Young became the only voice of sexual experience in our art community, establishing his hyper-masculine identity as a hot 'player'. Daniella Mooney, a student in Young's Performance Art class at the time of *Come Again*, appropriated my composite of him in *Wanted* in a work that spoke of sexual and artistic agency within both our micro-community and broader patriarchal structures.

In *I Heart New Work* (after Young's wall painting, *I Love New Work* (2007)), Mooney walked into the Michaelis Gallery, her class and supervisors following her, took out a permanent marker and signed her name over my image of Ed (she had discussed the work with me beforehand and in fact reprinted the image herself and replaced mine with an identical copy) partially in reference to Pierre Manzoni's famous signing of real naked women (a gesture that claimed ownership of the women and 'transformed' them into *his* artworks). This performance functioned on many levels; Young is well known for his appropriation of others' artworks and ideas, as well as his constructed misogynistic persona, and was in a position of power as Mooney's lecturer at the time. The intervention particularly played with notions of a female "first person sexual" (Wolf 1998:4). In reclaiming my narrative of intercourse with Young, Mooney's intervention made evident the power structures inherent in autobiographical sexual discourse.

37 See <http://www.artthrob.co.za/07aug/diary.html>

ONE HUNDRED BULLETS WITH YOUR NAME ON THEM

One Hundred Bullets with Your Name on Them 2007
(work in progress)
100 engraved bullets
photograph: Jake Aikman



One Hundred Bullets With Your Name On Them explicitly draws the link between sex and violence with promises, recriminations, apologies and pillow talk shakily engraved in a childish cursive handwriting on one hundred 30-06 rifle bullets, the world's most popular hunting calibre. With texts ranging from *I'm Sorry* to *Let's Pretend This Never Happened* to *Fuck Me* and, of course, *I Love You*, the piece converts words that I have received into violent story of disappointments

Unlike a single souvenir, the collection seeks to create an "hermetic world" (Stewart 1993:152), a closed system that replaces notions of origin, function or real history with a personal classificatory system. The collection is strongly linked to the sentimental and the nostalgic, and *One Hundred Bullets With Your Name On Them* uses this structure, presenting now lethal phrases collected as I traverse sexual relationships. The repetition of certain phrases within the collection of bullets functions to name the 'fakeness' or insincerity of the emotion that each phrase might be presumed to project. Here each bullet suggests the "miniaturized units, [...] matrices [and] memory banks" from which the real is produced (Baudrillard 1988:170) and questions the nature of supposed sincere apology, desire or affections.

The work thus uses the act of telling, remembering and inscribing as a type of cathartic expression of past liaisons. The title, however, is the key to the transformative process where, through the act of engraving each bullet myself and the agency gleaned in creating such a piece, I transform my pain into pleasure, both my own and for the viewer. The phrase "a bullet with your name on it" suggests there is a bullet ascribed to killing you, thus each phrase and the event it refers to now belongs to me, as does the choice to destroy them.

One Hundred Bullets with Your Name on Them also reflects the orgasm, with one hundred objects of murder collected together and transformed through the language of the lover into one hundred little deaths (*La petite mort*), each equally seductive and lethal. The bullet as a fetish object is hardly a surprising phenomenon, explicitly linking sex and death through this penetrating phallus. With texts suggesting the violence of the romantic relationship, of love, *One Hundred Bullets with Your Name on Them* is a collection of desire and fear. The seduction of the objects themselves also became apparent as fascinated visitors peered at these usually hidden transgressive items, now shiny and beautiful. It became important in the piece that the nature of the artwork allowed others to gaze at what they would usually find to be repelling, for "when horror is subject to the transfiguration of an authentic art, it becomes a pleasure, an intense pleasure, but a pleasure all the same" (Bataille 1949 [2003]: 2).

YOU DO IT TO YOURSELF
(AND THAT'S WHAT
REALLY HURTS)

wall, fake blood, perspex, two pumps, hose
Edition of 5

University of Cape Town

In talking about art and emotion Jameson describes “the moment in which, often cathartically, that “emotion” is then projected out and externalised, as gesture or cry, a desperate communication and the outwards dramatisation of inward feeling.” (Jameson 1991: 12) It is this gesture that is enacted and parodied in *You Do It To Yourself (and that's what really hurts)*, a gallery wall that pumps blood from an horizontal slit across its surface.

The title refers self-consciously to the angst-ridden nineties Radiohead anthem, *Just*, and suggests (like the song³⁸) that any suffering the artist is feeling here is self-inflicted. The vastness of the cutting gesture, coupled with the actual pumping liquid and the alt-rock title with its obvious reference to self-mutilation, combine in this piece to suggest that the notion of art as an externalisation of the artist's raw emotions through catharsis is, in fact, an overly dramatic one. While *You Do It To Yourself* does reference the culture of young women and self mutilation (as discussed earlier), replacing my own body with the wall of the art institution, the work is, like the rest of my oeuvre, not intended to be deadly serious. Instead, the bleeding wall uses the aesthetics and excess of the laughable schlock horror, slasher film to undermine the myths of heroism that separate artists from citizens of real life.

As well as corresponding to the artist's body, *You Do it to Yourself* also exists in opposition to Abstract Expressionist gestural painting, where the artist spews his (and I use the male pronoun intentionally) emotions onto the canvas, asserting a view of painting as “self examination, self-reassurance and self expression” [that] was definitive for the Abstract Expressionists and their public alike” (Hess 2005: 10). Although the violence of my wound is simultaneously more explicit and also further removed from the artist's hand than that of Pollock (for example) in the manner in which *You Do It To Yourself* makes reference to the suffering artist, it also suggests the grand, virile and masculine paintings of the Abstract Expressionists who “had come to stand for a certain kind of frontier heroism” (Hess 2005: 16).

In particular, *You Do It To Yourself* makes reference to Lucio Fontana's slash series, which made obvious the analogy of painting as a cut into the surface of the canvas, where the brush is “like a knife, opening space, slashing away at the paintings' flatness. The painting now is a wound. Between the surface and the mark is now a fissure, a gap, a gulf as deep as the imagination will allow” (Sayre 1994:65). Unlike Fontana's neat and minimal slices, however, my wound does more than imply corporeality, with litres of fake blood suggesting a kind of hysteria (reminiscent of the teenage cutter) I doubt he would have approved of.

Outside of the art history canon, the bleeding wall motif is culled directly from the language of horror, in particular the haunted house genre of schlock horror movies.

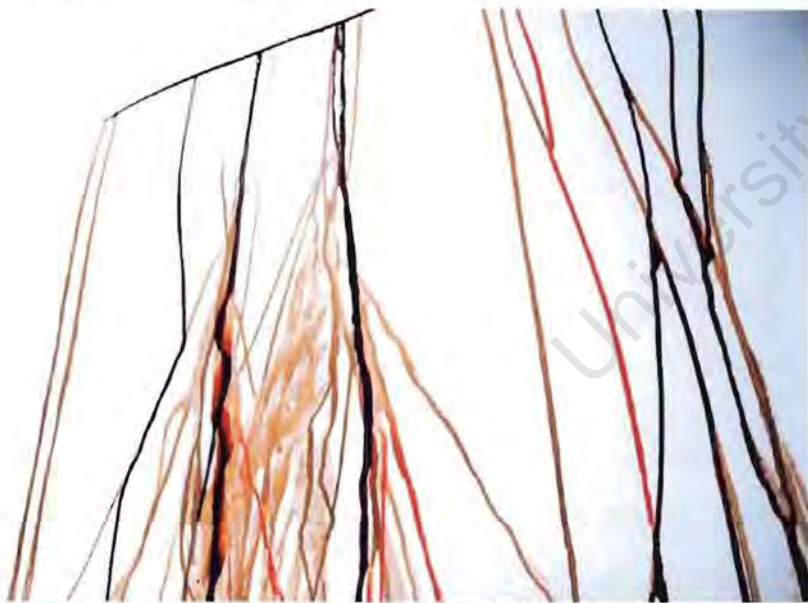
38 Lyrics include “Don't get my sympathy hanging out the 15th floor [...] You do it to yourself, you do. And that's what really hurts, is that you do it to yourself, just you, you and no one else”. -



Rowan Smith tests the blood mechanism

Unlike the standard bleeding wall though (where blood oozes through the wallpaper), this blood flows freely from a wound, echoing Pinedo's "wet death" (1997: 51 – 68). In *You Do It To Yourself (and that's what really hurts)* the wall is perpetually bleeding, pumping out its life force without end, stuck in the moment of cutting or penetration, the "involuntary spasm" (Pinedo 1997: 62) that climaxes just before death. In short, a never-ending cum shot.

The fakeness of the blood in *You Do It To Yourself* functions to link it to the schlock horror movie and the kitsch that this implies, distances it from the seriousness of multitudes of 'identity' blood pieces, and also allows it to function within the realm of the joke or trick, suggesting the parody of catharsis discussed earlier. Although real blood cascading down a wall would no doubt be seductive, it would not be seductive in the same way as horror's special effects, where the blood need be "realistic but imperfect" (Pinedo 1997: 55) so that the viewer can simultaneously enjoy the horror while appreciating the artifice. The fact of the bleeding wall as an art object must allow it to be unreal - an actual inexplicable bleeding wall would incite fear and repulsion rather than pleasure. The emphasis on the unreality of the blood in this case re-iterates this notion of the unreality of art, where mimesis allows a viewer to take pleasure in the representation of the horrific as well as mimicking the "faked" emotion (Solomon 1991: 4) that defines sentimentality - linking the notions of the sentimental and the horrific in an orgy of excess.



You Do it To Yourself (and that's what really hurts) (in Progress) 2008
fake blood, perspex, two pumps, hose

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ADDENDUM A

ONE MORE ROBOT - SYMPATHY 3000-21

Unit three thousand twenty one is warning
Makes a humming sound - when its circuits
Duplicate emotions - and a sense of coldness detaches
As it tries to comfort your sadness -

One more robot learns to be something more than
A machine - when it tries the way it does - make it seem
Like it can love -
Cause it's hard to say what's real - when you know the
Why you feel - is it wrong to think it's love
When it tries the way it does...

Feeling a synthetic kind of love
Dreaming a sympathetic wish -
As the lights blink faster and brighter -

One more robot learns to be something more than
A machine - when it tries the way it does - make it seem
Like it can love -
Cause it's hard to say what's real - when you know the
Why you feel - is it wrong to think it's love
When it tries the way it does.

Flaming Lips. 2002. Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots. Warner Bros. Records.